PORTRAIT IN A MIRROR

by CHARLES MORGAN

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PORTRAIT IN A MIRROR

BY

CHARLES MORGAN

". . . she is what my heart first awaking
Whisper'd the world was."

GEORGE MEREDITH

"It was in my mind to say that a portrait should be the image of one spirit received in the mirror of another."

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CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	DRUFFORD	7
II.	LISSON	19
III.	FAREWELL TO DRUFFORD	133
IV.	WINDRUSH	166
V.	DRUFFORD REVISITED	277
VI.	LISSON AGAIN	289

PORTRAIT IN A MIRROR

I

DRUFFORD

In the summer of 1875, when I was in my eighteenth year, I went on my first visit to a country house. Though my father's home at Drufford in Kent was at that time rural enough—far too rural for my sister Ethel's taste—the words country house deserve to be emphasized to mark the contrast between the solid comforts of Drufford and what Ethel called the "style" of the Trobeys' "place in Oxfordshire." "The Trobeys'," she said, "is a real country house. It is miles from Singstree station. There's an avenue in front of it, and, of course, one cannot see the house from the road."

I wondered why she and my brother Richard were introducing me to a scene of so much magnificence; for she had often given me clearly to understand that, though I might be very clever, I was an awkward, moony boy, and that, if I didn't keep my wits about me and look where I was going and speak up when I was spoken to I should be laughed at all my life and come to

a bad end. Yet it was through her intercession with Pug Trobey that I had been included this year in Mrs. Trobey's invitation.

"It will be good for Nigel," she said, "to mix with people."

"Depends on the people," answered my father, who felt that we were flying too high. "It is a safe rule, Ethel, never to accept invitations from those who make you ashamed of your own home."

"I am not ashamed. I never said I was ashamed, Papa."

"But you sometimes speak as if you were," he replied; and, forgetting that she was three-and-twenty, he reminded her of her many complaints as if she had been still a schoolgirl. She answered him sharply, very like a schoolgirl in her rebellion, and an old wrangling was renewed between them until at last my mother intervened with —"That is not the way to speak to your father, Ethel, dear," and Ethel flounced out of the room in such indignation that I was sent after her to tell her to return and close the door more quietly.

She obeyed with her pretty cheeks flaming. My father, his eyes angry and his lips quietly ironic, watched her over a lowered copy of *The Times*; my mother pressed her silken elbows to her silken sides and looked nowhere but at her sewing; Richard, who was Ethel's close ally and would always do what he could to cover her humiliation,

said loudly: "What chance do you think this new Expedition has of reaching the Pole, Sir?" I stood by the table, staring at the frosted globe of the lamp, not venturing, after my first glance at Ethel, to turn my head towards her again. Suddenly I heard her say: "I think I shall stay here after all."

My father's paper was laid rustling on his knees. "You will do nothing of the kind, Ethel. You will go to your room and not return until you have better control of your temper. Bless my soul, you are old enough to know better. And be careful to shut the door quietly."

"Very well, Papa. If I am to be sent to bed like a child, I shall say good night."

"As you please."

She kissed my mother.

"Good night, Richard."

"Good night, Ethel."

"Good night, Nigel."

Her hand was on the door when my mother, like a spiritless actress speaking her line in a play because her cue was come, said without moving: "Ethel, dear, have you said good night to your father?"

Ethel, her face white now, walked across to my father's arm-chair and touched with her lips the cheek he presented with a stiff, sideways movement of his head. Then she left the room.

"Poor Ethel," said my mother. "How silly she is! She doesn't mean it, Papa, I'm sure."

"She has ideas in her head, that's all, my dear. I dare say she'll grow out of it."

My father folded his newspaper and put it in a brass rack at his side; then lifted himself out of his chair. Except that he wore a short coat of black alpaca, his dress was still that in which he went to the City: loose, dark trousers strapped under the instep; square boots with cloth tops; and a large collar low at the back and rising, under his chin, to wide flaps lightly starched. A line of short beard and whiskers rimmed his face, leaving his lower lip and the greater part of his cheeks uncovered, and contrasting, in its sprinkling of white, with the glossy black of his hair. His moustache, long and drooping, but so narrow that his mouth was nowhere hidden, was already more grey than black. From in front he looked his fifty-five years, but from behind, with his lively shoulders and erect carriage, he seemed a far younger man.

"What sort of people are these that you're going to, Richard?" he asked.

"The Trobeys, Sir?" In voice, as in all else, Richard was very like my father—less aggressively simple, as befitted a tea-merchant's son who had brought an Oxford degree into the office, but with the same masterful tone, the same wary, eager, confident eyes. "The Trobeys are very good people. Pug you've met."

"Too much of a la-di-da for me."

"He was a Blue anyhow," said Richard, but,

seeing that my father was not greatly impressed by this, he proceeded: "And old Trobey—well, he's a friend of Dizzy's."

"So you've said. But I mean the people you meet there. It's not all Trobeys at these parties, I'll be bound."

"Oh, first-raters, Sir."

"Your father means, Richard—are they fast, extravagant people in a different set from our own? Of course, Mr. Jon Trobey—Pug as you call him—was in your set at Oxford, but all that, I am sure, changes when you come out into the world. We should not like Nigel or Ethel to mix with young folk who have irregular ways."

"I can't answer for all of 'em, Mamma. I dare say, if the truth's told, there'll be a few who won't be off to bed by ten o'clock."

"Richard, Richard, you must try not to speak so impatiently."

"Very well, Mamma."

"You know quite well what is meant, Richard," my father said. "Drinking, gambling—that kind of thing? Any of that?"

"Oh no, Sir, I give you my word. Possibly there'll be no one there except the Trobeys and ourselves and Ned Fullaton—oh, and I suppose Miss Sibright and her aunt. You know Ned."

"He seemed a sober young fellow when I met him at Oxford—I'll say that. But he will never set the Thames on fire, my boy. Not a worker, eh?"

"Well, Sir, he'll own Windrush some day. He hasn't any need to slave. One of the finest of the smaller places in Herefordshire. They say he'll stand for Parliament. Old Trobey promised to mention him to the Prime Minister."

"I can see Dizzy's mouth water in anticipation of Mr. Ned Fullaton. Nothing less than an Earl's son is much good to his Tory Democracy."

"And this lady you speak of," said my mother, escaping from politics by the shortest route, "this Miss Sibright—is she Mrs. Ned to-be?"

Richard frowned and ran his finger round his shirt collar. "I have told you about her, Mamma. She's the girl that Pug and Ned and I met at Oxford our last Commem. She's devilish lovely I dare say—like a Rossetti picture, Ned's governor says, and, being an artist, he ought to know. Ned was bowled clean over; couldn't keep his eyes—— Anyhow, I believe Pug would have been too, only he goes slower. No one knew much about her; she came to Oxford to make up a party with vague relations of some kind. The College Balls were all agog about her, and the little Fresher she belonged to had to be dipped in the Isis the term afterwards. Went about writing poems, and had grown long hair in the Vac., all because the uncle and aunt she lives with asked the little beggar down to Somerset to stay. Ned was asked, too. That's how it happened. Turns out she hasn't a halfpenny."

"In those circumstances," said my father, "I suppose young Trobey doesn't regret his caution?"

Richard laughed. "Oh, you're hard on Pug, Sir. I believe he has green eyes still. She's pretty enough to tempt most men, but Pug has to consider ways and means. Ned can afford luxuries."

"But if she is so poor," my mother asked, expressing in her strong, pale face an indomitable curiosity about this girl of whom Richard spoke so much, yet always reluctantly, "how does she travel about in this way—Oxford in Commemoration week, and so on? Oxford is not a cheap place, is it, dear?"

My father grunted. Two long wrinkles appeared on his face parallel to the droop of his moustache. The money he had been compelled to spend in Oxford was an old joke.

"This uncle and aunt of hers are comfortable enough," Richard explained; "but she's an orphan and they have children of their own."

My mother considered her own problems in silence.

"You speak, Richard," she said at last, "as if you did not fancy Miss Sibright."

"Oh yes, Mamma, awfully handsome and all that, but——"

"Not quite womanly, is that it?"

"N-no. She's too deuced pretty to give herself any Girton airs. Only the plain ones go in for that, I've noticed. Women know which side their

bread's buttered—eh, Sir? No, it's not that. But she laughs at the things that any other girl would think important—social things, I mean, in the county and so on, which Ned thinks no end of —oh, and all the little trifles, too, that one expects an amusin' girl to chatter about. You never know when she's laughing at you, or when she is suddenly going to be solemn as a judge about the oddest things. Bearing-reins, for instance. Said she'd walk rather than drive in the Fullatons' carriage until the bearing-reins were off. She positively wouldn't get in, and when her own aunt told her not to be silly and that she'd driven behind bearing-reins before, she said: 'Not in this carriage. I shall have to drive in this one all my life.' Ned says she looked as if she was going to cry; besides, the footman was beginning to grin; so he had to make a joke of it and do as she wished. And once at Oxford—I heard this myself—Drooper (you remember Drooper—the fellow from the House who drove a four-in-hand and played a mandolin)—Drooper was singing one of his best songs about flirting on the ice. You know, it's the one that goes—

> 'O Mothers of daughters
> Beware when the waters
> In winter are covered with ice——'"

"That," my father interrupted, "is all we need to know, Richard."

"Oh, very good, Sir. Quite mild, I assure you.

Everyone, even Drooper's mother, old Lady Singstree, was laughing and making a chorus of each verse—where it repeats itself, you know—

'He cannot but welcome her charms . . . tee-tum . . .
He cannot but welcome her charms——'

Don't worry, Mamma, I'll not go on if it distresses you."

"But I am very interested in what you were telling me about Miss Sibright, Richard, dear. Continue with that, pray. There is no need to repeat the song."

"No, perhaps not," said Richard regretfully, for he had been living in the old scene and enjoying it. "Why, I can see him now, old Drooper with his long legs waving about and his eyeglass flying over his shoulder, jumping on a chair and brandishing his mandolin in one hand and a gown in the other and leading the chorus. . . . Anyhow, when it was all over we were talking about flirting and whether it was a fine art and such nonsense. Everyone had said something except Miss Sibright, when suddenly Drooper pointed to her and asked what her opinion was. She had only to giggle like the rest of 'em and no more would have been heard of it. Instead of that she blushed and didn't answer. She wasn't usually at a loss, and Drooper thought this was some new game of hers. 'Come, Miss Sibright,' said he, '*you* ought to know'—a stiffish emphasis on the

you that set us all grinning. 'You mean I am a flirt,' she answered. 'If I am, it's because I can't help it. I think it's a shameful, detestable thing. Unhappy, too.' Coming from her, although her face looked serious, this seemed a better joke than ever. Lady S., I remember, leaned across to me and whispered, 'What an actress she is!' Drooper walked up to Miss Sibright and made her an elaborate bow. Pray, what was there shameful, he asked, in turning everyone's head? 'By Jove,' he said, picking up his cup, 'if there was something better in this than tea, I'd drink to the health of the Belle of Oxford. Why should any goddess so charmin' be ashamed of the dance she leads us poor mortals?' We were just picking up our own cups—in no time we should have been toasting her, tea or no tea—when suddenly she put an end to it. 'Because,' said she, 'it's playing with love.' You don't know what it felt like when she had said that—like being in church or something. Her eyes had tears in them that trickled over, and she didn't even try to wipe them away. That's the kind of girl she is. Never know where you are with her."

My parents received this in silence.

"Emotional, I should say," my mother ventured at last.

"Sounds foreign to me," my father said. "Sibright? What's that?"

"Oh, good West Country, Ethel says."

"Ethel doesn't know everything. People with

foreign blood keep it very dark nowadays—except in Downing Street."

"Ethel," said Richard, loyally defensive, "knows a deuced lot about families."

"More than's good for her."

"Now, Papa," said my mother, greatly daring, "remember the advice that Major Pendennis gave to his nephew. Only last night you were reading it to me."

"All very well in novels, my dear. . . . Besides, Thackeray was always a snob."

"I'm afraid we all are sometimes," my mother replied, "unless we are very sure of ourselves."

"Sure of ourselves? Queer kind of humility, I must say."

"And yet——" she began; but closed her lips. Before us children there might be no argument, however gentle. Her own and my father's thought must appear as one.

Throughout this long conversation I had been staring at Richard—thinking at first what a dashing man of the world he was; then forgetting him and seeing only Drooper, with his waving legs and elaborate bow, and an imagined Miss Sibright whose tears I was sure I could have understood. I had begun to feel that all women, except the hard, sneering kind, must be exceedingly unhappy creatures. At the mention of Ethel's name, I felt sorry for her, and, without a word, ran upstairs and knocked at her bedroom door.

"Who's there?"

"Nigel."

"Not another message from Papa?"

"No."

"What do you want, then?"

"I thought—— I thought, perhaps, that you—— That is, can I come in?"

"No, you cannot. I'm half undressed."

The voice was sharp and determined. I had pictured my disgraced sister weeping in satin.

"As long as you are all right," I said. "Good night."

"Of course I'm all right. . . . Little idiot!"

I went downstairs again and sat gazing at the frosted globe of the lamp until my father said: "Why don't you do something, my boy. You'll injure your eyes like that."

II

LISSON

The Trobeys' house, called Lisson after the piece of high ground on which it stood, was not so splendid a mansion as Ethel supposed. Square, compact, and well-proportioned, it was built, as I learned afterwards from Agatha Trobey, together with much else that she had gleaned of her family's history, in the year of Walpole's death, to replace a rectory destroyed by fire. Its first inhabitant was Jonathan Trobey, then Rector of Singstree. Jonathan's son, another Jonathan, became Rector in 1776. The next two generations of Trobeys were exiles from the place, the first because he ran away as a boy, and went, with a suitable wife, to the dogs; the second because Singstree was not even a name to him, and he was busily occupied in dragging prosperity out of the thirty years that followed Waterloo. This William, who began with nothing except a fear of hunger, left to Mark, his only child, not a great fortune, but a solid business in hardware. This was in 1845—just a century after the building of the forgotten Rectory and when Mr. Mark Trobey was thirty years old.

Mr. Trobey had no more taste for hardware than his runaway grandfather had had for the Church. He was interested in three things: politics; Miss Anne Devakker; and, in strange contrast, peace, quiet, and gilt-edged investments. Politics meant for him that partnership between the "two nations" which had lately been spoken of in *Sybil*, a passionate defence of the young Queen against the many who were then inclined to sneer at her, and an acquaintanceship, sprung from the City, with Mr. Disraeli himself. Anne was of an age with the Queen; her entrancing shoulders had the regal slope; and her mother, seeing Mr. Trobey beside her daughter and perhaps aware of his loyal weakness, had once declared that, except in height, he positively reminded her of Prince Albert himself. This for Mr. Trobey was enough encouragement. If Miss Anne made no secret of her disdain of merchandise, if she curled her lip now and then at the shortness of his honest legs, he did not notice it. He was blinded by an idea, as only men of few ideas can be: he was her consort—at any rate his head and shoulders were. Nothing could deter him. Even when it was delicately hinted that Mrs. Devakker's debts were even more embarrassing than her many daughters, he only thanked God that he was able to assist his darling's loved ones. That he was making a purchase seems not to have entered his mind. For him, Anne's long reluctance was part of her maidenly charm, and, during

their engagement, she was careful not to undeceive him.

With Disraeli as friend and Anne for wife, he needed only peace, quiet, and gilt-edged securities. The last he obtained by selling for cash a partnership in his increasing business and himself virtually retiring from it. He began then to consider where in the country he should settle. Mrs. Trobey assisted him. Her hopeful researches into the Trobey pedigree brought her to Jonathan Trobey, who had been Rector of Singstree from 1741 to 1776. Taking her husband instantly to seek for honourable tombs, she found the two Jonathans side by side.

The old Rectory was empty. They wandered up the drive and peeped through its windows. On an opposite hill was Singstree House, where lived Lord Singstree, whose family was connected with the Devakkers' in a remote, cousinly way. Where, they asked in the village, did the Rector live now? They were shown a large new building in red and black brick on the same hill with the great house. "His Lordship's brother is Rector now. Old Rectory's for sale." Mrs. Trobey decided that her husband should be its purchaser, and he did not resist. To abandon hardware for ever, to live quietly in Oxfordshire with Anne, perhaps to have a finger in local politics—he asked no more. His wife, he perceived, had made up her mind, and he was glad to agree with her. It might be useful, she said with a glance at

Singstree House, to have relations near at hand. After all, had not this been the Trobeys' county for over a hundred years? Certainly, poor Mark could claim no other.

"But it will need improvements," she warned him.

"Yes, my dear."

"And we will call it Lisson Hall."

"But we must call it what they call it," he said. "It has been there so long."

"How stubborn you are, Mark. There can't be two rectories in the place can there?"

"Wouldn't ours be just the Old Rectory, my dearest one? It's a quiet name."

"Quiet! Certainly I shall not live in any place so called."

This was Agatha's story, gathered from her parents and, perhaps, adorned a little by her knowledge of them.

In the end the house came to be known as Lisson. Improvements were made. When Pug was born—he was christened Jonathan as a perpetual reminder that he had ancestors—a new wing was thrown out which contained a nursery and a night-nursery on its upper floor, and what afterwards became a smoking-room on its lower. White urns full of geraniums sprang up on the terrace; a coat of arms decorated the fireplace; a veranda grew from the drawing-room; there were two bathrooms by '75. Miss Anne Devakker made the best of the

marriage which all her life she considered her misfortune.

Ethel had said: "It is miles from Singstree station," and I was alarmed to discover that the miles were but three and soon covered in the Trobeys' carriage. I would gladly have driven on through the smiling countryside for a dozen hours rather than arrive among strangers. Too soon we swung into "the avenue," a short, curving approach of polished gravel, bordered by two small plantations, one of which, in that first week of July, was an effective screen between garden and road. The smell was sweet and woody. A leaf fluttered on to my knees which, when I pressed it, stained my dog-skin gloves and gave out a scent as of smoke and violets, and I leaned out of the carriage to snatch, if I could, another leaf from some branch that had escaped the gardeners' competent pruning. At that instant, as I looked ahead, the "avenue" denied my last hope of postponement. We wheeled round one bend; there was no other. Before us was the house, with a porch of scrolled woodwork and stained glass attached to its plain Georgian face.

Ethel's voice said: "Don't stare out like that, Nigel. What will they think if they are watching from the windows? You don't want them to know, do you, that you have never been visiting before?"

None but servants greeted us, and we were taken at once to our rooms.

"Where are they all?" I whispered as we went upstairs.

"They are giving Ethel a chance to titivate after her journey," Richard explained. He always told me what I wanted to know without sneering at my ignorance, and, though we had little in common, I loved and admired him. I admired Ethel, too, but was afraid of her.

"It's the custom in big houses," she said. "When Papa goes running to the door to shake hands—well, it would seem awfully funny to people like the Trobeys or the Fullatons, wouldn't it, Richard? Like having 'Salve' on the mat."

"Is that wrong, too?" I asked.

As Ethel first and Richard next disappeared into their rooms and doors closed upon them, I felt that I was being left alone in an alarming world. But I followed the manservant down the long passage by which he led me—how far I was being taken from them, and how impossible it would be ever to find them again!—and arrived at last at a room in the new wing, a stiff, square little room with flowers, which were understood at home to be effeminate and unhealthy in bedrooms, standing on its mantelpiece. The man repeated to me the formula he had spoken to each of the others: "Mrs. Trobey is in the harbour, Sir. You was to take afternoon tea with her there when ready." With that, he closed my door also.

What was expected of me I did not know. "Mrs. Trobey is in the harbour, Sir," had meant nothing to me, and it was not until I had examined the wall-paper and looked into the wardrobe that I translated the message and decided that my hostess was expecting me in what, at home, would have been called the summer-house. "Oh, that explains why Ethel calls *ours* the 'arbour,' " I thought. For a moment I was awed, then suddenly laughed, and, seeing my own laughing face in the wardrobe mirror, was sobered again. I was afraid to laugh in this unfamiliar room. Soon, I felt sure, the servant would appear again to say that my brother or my sister, or perhaps Mrs. Trobey herself, was waiting for me. He must not discover me wandering about the room with nothing done, nothing ready.

On the washstand was a can of hot water covered by a towel. Throwing off my coat and waistcoat, I washed myself, only to discover when I had finished that I had rumpled my hair and was without brush or comb. The dressing-table mirror revealed a tousled head and eyes wide in alarm. A ridiculous panic seized me. Dropping on my knees before the table, I tried in vain to comb my hair with my fingers and smooth it with my palms. An image swam before me of Mrs. Trobey, imposing and faceless, with an immense silver teapot raised in her hand and a host of guests surrounding her. I saw myself approaching the tea-table—all eyes turned upon my disorder,

all lips curling at my ridiculous plight, Richard and Ethel overwhelmed by my shame. I heard myself absurdly saying, "I am very sorry, Mrs. Trobey, but I had no brush or comb." From this fantasy of shyness I returned suddenly. Why had I no brush and comb? Why had my luggage not been brought to me? I started up from my knees, dragged at the china handle of the bell, heard the wires loosely grate and groan, and knew that my ringing was useless. Going to the door, I peeped out on to the landing, perhaps to call for help, perhaps with an idea of attempting to rediscover my brother's room; but the rustling of feminine dress and the sound of footsteps, not Ethel's, drove me back. I shut the door. I dared not look out again. I knew not what to do.

What an agony there is in trifles when we are young! How deep a suffering of the spirit in precisely those miseries from which springs afterwards the loud laughter of music-halls! Some carry these sufferings into later years and can never laugh easily at physical humiliations; others forget so well that they can laugh comfortably even at the humiliation of a child. I have never forgotten that unreasoning distress of my first coming to Lisson—how I stood on the flowered carpet tracing the pattern with my toe, hopelessly at the end of my resources, and how, raising my eyes again to the dressing-table, I found myself confronted by what seemed to be an explanation of it all. On either side of the mirror was a brass

candle-bracket, and beneath each bracket was hung a little hair-tidy of cardboard and flowered-satin. I looked instantly to the washstand in search of shaving-papers; no case that might contain them was hanging there. This place, then, was intended for a woman. I had been brought here by mistake. Another servant had taken my luggage to a different room. I tugged at the bell again and again, expecting no answer; then walked to the window. The sun was yellow on the sill, and a small animal was crawling from the sunshine into a sharp wedge of shade. I forgot Mrs. Trobey. How strange, I thought, that I should be in a girl's bedroom! With sudden excitement I had begun to imagine her before the mirror—deep shadows beneath her brows and candle-light nodding and slanting from her hair—when there came a knock on the door. I turned, as if in a dream, almost expecting to see her.

"Your bag, Sir. Shall I unpack it for you?"

"No, no," I cried. "I will unpack it myself."

Losing, then, no time, I prepared myself for encounter with my hostess, so glad that my appearance need not now be disgraceful that a great part of my shyness was forgotten. I sniffed the good Scottish smell of my coat as I put it on, and was grateful to Richard for having insisted that although, as my mother had said, I was very young for so much expense, the new clothes given me for this visit should be made by his own tailor. After taking a last look at myself in the

wardrobe mirror, and wishing only that I was more of a dashing young man and less of a solemn boy, I opened my door with a feeling, if not of self-confidence, at least of pleasant excitement. I was proud of my new suit; my tie, bought by Richard, was bolder than any that I should have dared choose; and my boots, new yellow boots, made dusty by the journey, had been restored to their full yellowness by being wiped on the underside of the hearthrug. It seemed that I was not so absurdly different from other young men as Ethel had always led me to suppose. Never before had I been given the right clothes—that was the secret of it. The Trobeys, who, except Pug, had not seen me in my own home, might not consider me a freak after all. I closed my bedroom door with a firmness that I should never have dared in my father's house.

With less confidence I began my journey along the passage, seizing what excuse I could discover for not making overmuch haste. Near to my own door a room stood invitingly open—a long, low room with a broad bow-window at its farther end. I entered it and was instantly at ease. On the left, by the fireplace, was a scrap-book screen covered with pictures of dogs and snow, green meadows and huntsmen in pink, plum-puddings, holly, little girls praying, houses with gleaming windows, and red-cheeked boys climbing for red-cheeked apples—a cheerful medley from crackers and Christmas annuals, preserved here to immortality

by industrious scissors and paste. Near the screen was a Welsh spinning-wheel, and beyond the fireplace, under a little window that seemed to belong to it, a writing-desk blotched with ink and scored over with childish pencillings. The bookshelves of varnished pine held now a few three-volume novels whose modernity seemed an intrusion, but their principal burden was still the very picture-books from which the screen's decorations had in part been stolen. In the middle of the room was a vast round mahogany table, on which how many nursery teas had been spread! Now it was empty, tidy, a little forlorn. But the rocking-horse, a grey and white beast on curved green rockers, was vigorously alive. Someone had lately rejuvenated his distended nostrils with a new coat of vermilion, which gave to a veteran so scarred, so bald, so battered in ancient campaigns, an aspect of peculiar ferocity. All else was old, but the nostrils were freshly glistening. I touched them, and found that they were wet; the paint clung to my finger. As I examined this disaster and the thought of an expectant Mrs. Trobey returned to my mind, I became aware of a smell which straightway drove Mrs. Trobey out again.

It was to me then, and still is in my old age, the most exciting smell in the world.

This was no decorator's paint; this was no enamel out of a sixpenny pot! I looked swiftly round the room. A corner of it, between two bookshelves, was discreetly curtained, and behind the

curtain, when I dragged it aside, there were revealed a folded easel, several canvases stacked against the wall, and a small table rich with the tools of my trade. There was, then, in this house a fellow-painter in oils.

Who? I picked up one of the canvases and carried it to the light. It was a half-length of a girl seated. The robed figure of a man stooped over her from behind. No face had been given him, and his robe, like the robes in cheaply illustrated Bibles, seemed to be made of thickly coloured clay. The girl's face was an elaborately painted outline, flat, expressionless, opaque, yet with some shocking suggestion that it had been painted with sincerity by one who admired the madonnas of Luini. How, in this painting, sincerity of purpose was conveyed at all, I know not. But it was not to be mistaken; a spirit of some kind had gone to the painting of those mournful, china eyes. I put the canvas away with a feeling of repulsion and reverence—just what one feels in the presence of certain manifestations of insanity. Seizing a rag and some turpentine, I cleaned my finger and fled from the room. It was as if I had been prying into the secrets of a ghost. The staircase creaked; the hall flashed its Indian swords at me; three cats huddled together by the hatstand leaped and scattered at my approach. It was pleasant to be out on the lawn in the sunshine.

I did not care how many eyes were turned on me from the arbour. Even Mrs. Trobey's loose

hand was good to grasp. It struck me, I remember, that she must have had beautiful wrists when she was young, and I wished that she did not wear bangles whose weight exhibited the puffiness of her flesh.

"Well," said Ethel's voice, as I stood bewildered before the group of tea-drinkers, "wake up Nigel! This is my young brother, Mr. Trobey." I shook a firm heavy hand. Pug Trobey next gave me languid fingers and a thin affable laugh. "And that," Ethel went on, guiding me by my elbow, "is Miss Trobey. Come and say how do you do to her."

I was led a few yards to where a girl was lying on a long wheeled-chair in the shadow of an acacia-tree. Her back was to the tea-table, and she seemed not to be aware that she was being approached.

"This is my young brother, Agatha. Quite an artist, too, you know."

The girl raised herself and looked at me with pale, harmless eyes.

"Oh yes," she said, giving me her hand, "Ethel has shown me some drawings of yours. But you *can* draw; that's what's so odd. I can't, you know; though perhaps I see as much as you. Being an invalid makes it hard. One gets tired so soon." And she added slowly: "I'm rather tired now." Leaning back, she turned away her head. As I reached the tea-table again, I heard her say: "Have you ever noticed what faces there are in the bark of trees? They're always changing."

No one took the least notice of her, and I began to understand why Richard and Ethel had never said that Pug Trobey had a sister. I was given tea, folded bread and butter, and a seat between Mrs. Trobey and her husband. Mr. Trobey was a stumpy little man, square of shoulder and round of head, like a short end-post to a row of banisters. When he spoke, remembering Mrs. Trobey, his eyes were large and mournful as a puppy's; when he forgot her, they twinkled like a mischievous boy's.

"A-ha," he began. "You're early home from school this summer?" Hoping that his wife would approve this conversational attempt, he glanced across at me with the puppy's eyes. "Broke up early, eh? What is it—measles or mumps?"

"Mark, dear," said Mrs. Trobey, "just because you were always having measles or mumps when you were at school, you need not assume that everyone else suffers from them. Mr. Frew is not at school any longer. Very soon he will be at Oxford—or is it to be Cambridge? That was all explained to you last night."

"A-ha," Mr. Trobey began again. He had acquired a defensive habit of never giving to his wife more than half his attention. "So you're for Oxford, are you—or Cambridge? All the same to me. I never went to either, unfortunately. We started work younger in my day."

"Well, Sir," I answered, "it will be Oxford, if

it's either. Richard went there, you know. But still——"

"Of course it will be Oxford," Ethel put in. "Nigel has ridiculous ideas about not wanting to go to a university, Mrs. Trobey."

"And why, pray?"

I could have told her husband my reasons easily enough, though I knew he would think them bad; but Mrs. Trobey's curly head and hard, searching eyes, which seemed to belong to some powerful tufted bird, tied my tongue, so that I could answer only:

"You see, I want to paint."

One corner of her mouth slipped upward. "Really," she said, "that is very interesting. So many young people nowadays have that hobby. My own poor Agatha is devoted to it. But the University will be a necessary training, will it not, for whatever *profession* you choose?"

"But that is to be my profession."

"Painting? And what does your father say?"

"He——" I saw Ethel waiting to interrupt. "He doesn't approve, Mrs. Trobey."

"I'm not surprised!"

"Still," I went on with awkward *naïveté*, "my father has Richard in his business now, and I think he knows I shouldn't be much good at it. It was because of my health, you know, that he let me give up school several years ago. I'm well again, of course; but I think in the end he may allow——"

"Oh, but Nigel," Ethel exclaimed, "being just an artist and nothing else! . . . I don't blame you for not wanting to go into Papa's business, but——"

"It's a remarkably sound business, my dear young lady," said Mr. Trobey.

"I know," she answered impatiently, "but—well, you didn't want to go on in business, did you, Mr. Trobey? I don't blame Nigel for that. But being an artist—think of the people he will have to live with. Of course there are a few now who are quite *comme il faut* outwardly and are received; but that's the first flight. The rest—well. . . . Look at the little man who lives near us at Drufford. Mr. Doggin he's called; he has been teaching Nigel ever since he was a small boy. It's he who has encouraged him—isn't it, Nigel? And what does he know——"

"He can draw—he can draw like Dürer," I said hotly.

"Think of that!" cried Ethel, laughing. "He has been flattering you, Nigel, that's what it is."

"Oh come," Richard said. "It's not really serious, of course, Mrs. Trobey, but I must say Nigel can draw most awfully well."

"Deuced well," said Pug, "some of his comic ones—d'you remember that one he did of the ladies in the pew 'longside your own at Drufford? Why, he hit them off to a T. Good enough for *Punch*, I say."

But Ethel was now so warm against the uncon-

ventionalities of Doggin that she forgot how proud she ordinarily was of my parlour-tricks. "Well, I shouldn't like my brother to be a Mr. Doggin when he grows up. He has a way of fawning on you when he's not too wrapped up in himself to speak at all. Why won't the Academy look at him if he's as good as you say, Nigel?"

Pug caught at a word in a conversation that bored him.

"Oh, by the way, speakin' of the Academy, Miss Frew, you have been this year, haven't you? What did you think of this Miss Thompson they talk so much of? Pretty queer for a woman—blood and so on, what?"

Ethel recovered her good temper as soon as Pug addressed her. "The dying soldier is *too* pathetic, though, Mr. Trobey. And the boy laughing. Most people thought it so clever. Miss Thompson isn't really one of the New Women, they say."

"But these wounds and all that? Lady Singstree was tellin' us that they're awfully true to nature. Isn't that so, Mamma? What puzzles me is how a woman gets such ideas. How can she paint what she hasn't seen—you tell us that, Nigel."

"I expect," said Richard, "she knows what a wound looks like in much the same way that Lady Singstree knows whether or not a wound's true to nature."

Pug considered in silence this defence of the artistic imagination and, not understanding it,

decided that it must be a joke. "Haw!" he said. "That's awfully good! But it is a bit of a poser, what? We must ask Ned Fullaton's father when they come. He knows everything about art."

I had not known that Henry Fullaton was expected to arrive that evening with Ned and Miss Sibright and her aunt. Whether I was glad or sorry I do not know; but certainly I was excited and a little alarmed. Henry Fullaton was a senior academician whose work had never given me pleasure; if he was vain and demanded flattery, I should not easily please him. Mr. Doggin had a deep contempt for his work: "That man," he had exclaimed on first hearing that Richard was a friend of Henry Fullaton's son, "do I know him? Indeed, I do. He's a fashion-painter of the Napoleonic era, with his elegant officers bidding farewell to meditative maidens on garden seats. Paint? Oh yes; he can paint. No one can paint a garden seat better. What's more, he really can paint a body beneath drapery. There never was a sensual artist better adapted to genteel drawing-rooms. His ladies' eyes are the eyes of gazelles; their behaviour is what every matron would recommend; their clothes are prettily modest—except that they've all been made a little transparent by his genius and by a miraculous breeze which never disturbs their hair. That is how the man has succeeded. Oh yes, he can paint and he can draw. There are few who might not learn

from Fullaton—as a technician; particularly from the small subject-pictures in oils that he did when he was a young man. They have a precision——" I remember how angrily Mr. Doggin swept aside his own grudging praise of Henry Fullaton. "Bah!" he said. "He and I see nothing the same way. That's the long and short of it. 'The Gentle Master,' they call him. He protests against the label in the Press. But he loves it. 'The Gentle Master,' indeed!"

This, of course, was the phrase which Ethel now applied to him. Pug echoed it; Mrs. Trobey pecked at it; Richard laughed with Mrs. Trobey; Mr. Trobey said guilelessly that it must be very flattering to earn a nickname like that. In truth, they were all a little confused about Henry Fullaton's reputation, none certainly knowing what was the correct opinion to hold of his work. Was he still "the thing"? Or was he now a trifle out of date? They appealed to Ethel; but she could say only: "He wasn't exhibiting this year, so there was no discussion of him. But he is certainly very famous. I have never heard anyone speak against him except that Mr. Doggin of Nigel's, and—and one other."

What other? they all demanded. Ethel hesitated tried to take her words back, blushed most becomingly. What other? they insisted. Why was she so tantalizing?

"Perhaps I ought not to say," she began.

"Then don't say," Mr. Trobey put in.

"Mark, you are absurd," said his wife. "Now, Ethel——"

"Well," Ethel answered, "it was Miss Sibright, if you must know—when we were at Oxford. It wasn't exactly *against* Mr. Fullaton that she spoke. But when I said wasn't it interesting that Ned should have such a distinguished papa, she smiled and said 'very interesting' in that queer way of hers as if she didn't agree, but wouldn't be troubled to contradict. Of course, she's charming, but she is sometimes a little insincere, don't you think?"

They began to talk of Miss Sibright's insincerity just as they had all talked of the wounds in Miss Thompson's picture. Having chosen a convenient point on the surface of their subject they waltzed round it with evident enjoyment. From this conversation I felt myself to be excluded, not only by the will of the others, but my own incapacity to share in it. Ethel's eyes were turned upon me continually. "Is there nothing you can say?" they seemed to ask. Richard elaborately gave me openings; but I could achieve no more than a few embarrassed sentences before going into my retreat. Their conversation was flat and dull-minded, as Richard knew well enough; but what an appearance of sureness and ease they gave to it, and how cleverly Richard pretended that he was not bored! I envied them their power not to be serious. I wished that I could glide with their

worldly elegance from mild gaiety to mild spitefulness. But I had not an anecdotal mind; my thoughts went out on long, consecutive, exciting journeys which others, I felt sure, would not wish to share. How I longed, in their company, to escape from myself, so that, if I spoke at all, I might speak as they did—without original emphasis, without giving myself away!

In speaking of Miss Sibright, they recalled the scene of Drooper and his mandolin, of which I had already heard.

"Oh yes," said Pug, "wasn't that the time when she said that awfully queer thing about flirtin', and so on? What was it? Forgotten now—but awfully queer, I thought it."

Richard's memory was taxed and, with a certain reluctance, supplied the words for Mrs. Trobey's benefit.

"Dear, dear," said she, "what a solemn young person Miss Sibright must be!"

"Solemn!" cried Pug. "Solemn! You should hear her, Mamma! She's the life and soul of a party when it amuses her, and the very deuce of a flirt herself. That's what makes it so awfully queer."

It dawned upon me that what made her remark seem "awfully queer" to Pug was that Miss Sibright had given herself away, had allowed an original emphasis to break in. They tossed her words to and fro and laughed at their "solemnity," as they would have laughed at any of the com-

ments that I now had it in my mind to make. How terribly "young!" they said. How "emotional!" How "actressy!" "Oh, but she was an actress through and through," Pug exclaimed. "That's what knocked old Ned off his feet."

"I'm not at all sure," Ethel answered, feeling that she could now afford to be generous. "I think she's really a sweet girl at heart. So kind to animals and only a teeny-weeny bit insincere."

It was now time to go indoors. Mrs. Trobey rose with dignity; Mr. Trobey, with a gasp of relief, scrambled out of his wicker-chair.

"You'd better go up to dress early," said Richard to me under cover of the general movement. "You take so long over your tie. I'll come across from my room and see how you are getting on."

"Well, my young Nigel," said Pug, "you've been very silent. Thinkin' the deeper, what?"

"Mr. Frew is like your dear Papa, Jon," Mrs. Trobey said. "His thoughts soar beyond the chatter of ladies. What were you thinking of, Mark? Do tell us. It would be so interesting."

"Oh I don't know, m'dear," Mr. Trobey answered with weary cheerfulness, his round eyes vainly begging for relief from her teasing. "It was in my mind that I'd take my walk Cropley way next Sunday afternoon. Looking at Cropley Hill yonder made me think of it. Fine it looks as the sun catches it sideways—like an old dog curled up by the fire. Look, boy," he said, seizing my

shoulder with one hand and pointing with the other. "There's his head, d'you see—that slopey bit at the far end where Cropley village begins? And there's his tail—d'you see that—where the wood twists westward right round the base of the hill?"

"I don't suppose Mr. Frew is at all interested in your horse, or dog, or whatever it is lying by the kitchen fire," said Mrs. Trobey.

"Yes I am, Sir," I exclaimed. "That light—the way it seems to swirl up from the trees as if the trees themselves were throwing it out—I wish I could paint that."

There was silence. Even Mr. Trobey stared.

"Nigel always gets excited like that about light."

"Perhaps he and Mr. Trobey are a pair," said Mrs. Trobey. "Even my husband can be eloquent about what he sees on his Sunday walks. Poor Agatha likes listening to him. He stays with her if we go to evening service, and goes over all his adventures again. Doesn't he, Agatha?"

"Yes, Mamma."

They went towards the house, Pug wheeling his sister's chair, Richard arming Mrs. Trobey down the short grassy banks that separated the terrace from the lawn. Mr. Trobey's hand was still on my shoulder. He was showing me other animals in the landscape.

"Never mind their chatter," he said. "Keep your eyes open and your ears shut. That's the best rule when ladies are about. . . . Are you a walker?"

"Not a very strong one, I'm afraid, Sir."

"A-ha," he said, rubbing his chin. "Been ill haven't you? Manage ten miles?"

"About that."

"Well, next Sunday—what do you say—a lady's walk? Only there won't be ladies. And you needn't trouble much about talking when you're with me. Good to get away now and then." He checked himself suddenly and listened. There was a distant crunching of hooves on gravel.

"That will be the Fullatons," he said. "Come on. In through the conservatory. Up the side stairs. I'll show you. Then we needn't meet them till dinner. A-ha," he added. "Lucky I heard them. We might easily have been caught."

In fear of being late, I dressed quickly and without Richard's help. When all was done, there was time to spare, and I took up a pencil and sketch-book with which to make notes of the tea-table group in the garden. Mrs. Trobey's commanding and fierce affability, which I particularly wished to record, was not, I found, to be conveyed to paper; my sketches of her were all weaker or angrier than the truth. "I suppose," I said to myself, "that I was anxious and nervous and didn't watch her closely enough." So uncertain was my memory of even the simplest line that I laid the sketch-book aside and began to think of the pictures I would paint some day.

There was no pleasure so great or so consolatory as dreams of this kind. It was not in my nature, as it is in the nature of some artists, to rebel against my family and my family's friends while I was very young. In their company the difference between myself and them seemed all to my disadvantage; I had no pride in it, and blamed myself—oh, much more than Ethel blamed me!—for being ill at ease before the world. Even when I was alone, if my thought ran on the plane of their judgments, I would perceive nothing but my own inferiority, and understand too well how it was that they regarded my power to draw as a freakish attainment of no great importance in the world's scheme. Only in rare periods of solitary dreaming did I escape from the climate of their criticism and breathe a freer air. Once fairly launched upon an imagined picture, I had a foretaste of that highest joy of an artist—a shutting out of conflicting impulses, a complete isolation of spirit. I was then afraid of no one because no one had existence. My mind leapt and sang; it was filled with a sense of renewal, of a flowing and impregnating wisdom not my own.

They are deceived who think that an artist's work is no more than a highly organized view of truths already accessible in a different form, and that he is not a bringer of new truth, but an interpreter of the common stock. Art is news of reality not to be expressed in other terms. In

this sense an artist is a messenger of the gods, and for this reason cannot explain their message in a tongue other than his own. To say, because he cannot explain their charge to him, that he has not understood it or has never been in their company is to assume that nothing is real except what may be spoken of in the language of men not artists. It is to reject the authenticity of poetry, and to deny to the artist his own experience. The experience itself, and that it is of reality, is not by him to be mistaken. It may be isolated and final, like the falling of the seed from which a plant springs, or, like rain, be continually renewed upon him. In each case, his joy of it, ordinarily called creative, is a receptive joy; there is a close analogy in the feminine act of love, which is at once fierce and peaceful, a fulfilment and an initiation. The making of the work of art—the harvesting of the original truth —is a less intense experience than the conceiving of it, for in the moments of conception, and perhaps at no other time, the artist fully apprehends his gods and sees with their eyes their reality. This power to be impregnated, and not the writing of poems, the painting of pictures, or the composition of music, is the essence of art, the being an artist. Production may or may not follow after it; but, even in his childhood, while as yet he scarcely knows what it is to be a craftsman, an artist is wholly subject to it, and sees in it the riches of his life. Then, as the

craftsman moves towards manhood and discovers his craft, the miracle that has from the beginning been within him declares itself. Before, he was bidden; now he knows to what.

What pictures were in my mind as I stood that evening in my bedroom at Lisson I do not remember. Perhaps they have never been painted yet, nor ever will be; perhaps the spirit, if not the form, of some of them has entered into work of mine and lives there, though its seed is forgotten. This is certain—that my imagining, whatever the nature of it, possessed me, so that there was no place in my mind for the Trobeys or any embarrassment or fear. After I had stood for some minutes with an idle pencil, I looked at my sketch-book, and, seeing that the drawings I had attempted had no connexion with my present thought, closed it and went to the drawing-room. The door was open and the room empty; but if I had been the last instead of the first to arrive I should, in that mood, have entered with an equal firmness. I was no longer Ethel's brother, or Richard's admirer, or my father's incompetent son. The world of which, in their company, I was afraid had flowered for me alone. Crouching by the hearth, as my habit was in my own bedroom at home, I stared at a cross-stitch screen that shielded the empty grate, and read there: Hannah Kirk, 1808. "Whoever she was," I thought with mingled pity and triumph, "she's dead now." I imagined her fingers stitching;

then, skeleton fingers in the grave. "All my life's before me," I thought, "all my years are waiting until I come. But Hannah Kirk, if she is not dead, is old and withered." There seemed to me at that time to be an incongruousness in feminine old age, a denial of my own youth, for, though I was without definite anticipation of love, there was underlying all emotion a sense, which I could not confess even to myself, of something shy and ardent and sacred that should be a spiritual epitome of all my secrets; of something delicious and aspiring, urgent, flamelike; above all, of something approaching, so near that the breath of approach was upon me, yet so strange and sweet that I dared not welcome it. If I had not been isolated within my family, there might have been more of nature and less of magic in this approach. If I had not been an artist in his April seeking the visible world for a symbol, for an incarnation, of all that the gods had so long been whispering, I might have awaited entrancement with a lighter and freer heart. But my soul lay open. I was as a deaf man in a wood of singing birds, awaiting a miracle.

When I rose from the hearth, my spirit astride two worlds as the mind is in the act of waking, I began to look searchingly about me, watching with surprise the emergence of reality. The evidence given by its line and spacing that this part of Mrs. Trobey's house was a century and a half old had been overlaid, but not destroyed,

by her crowding taste. Though the panels were painted a dull green, though a white marble mantelpiece shone like a funeral monument above a multitude of fire-irons, and on an upright piano backed with pleated silk there stood maiden-hair in fluted pots and a litter of photographs in frames of velvet and pierced silver, the plain beauty of an earlier period somehow survived. Everywhere china hung in wire clips, stood on ebony brackets, or looked out of glass-fronted cupboards or glass-lidded tables. Two standard lamps of scrolled brass with glass-bead fringes on their shades threw a mackerel light on shot satin and rosewood.

Across the window recesses heavy brocade curtains were drawn. Those of the nearer window hung a little apart, revealing a slip of evening. Towards this I was moving to look out when the aperture seemed to move and increase. I halted spell-bound. With a shudder of silk the curtains closed; the daylight vanished. "Is anyone there?" I cried. "Is anyone there?" and dragged the curtains aside.

How she laughed at me, throwing her head back, quietly and merrily. "So you've come to life at last! So you've really come to life at last!"

A trembling, not of surprise, but of wonder, shook me from head to foot. It seemed that I had known all my life that I should find her here, that I had dreamed a thousand times of drawing these curtains and feeling her laughter spring upon

me from my own shadow. Her dark, grave hair, swept loosely back to an abundant coiling, the backward curve of her body as she laughed, the fleck of light on her chin upraised, the brilliant tension of her throat and breast—these gave her an ineffable air of speed, as if, drawn and suspended by high winds, she were driving a chariot across the sky and laughing as she passed. The wonder was that she did not vanish—that she was indeed woman with bare arms and shoulders that took my breath away. She was not unfriendly to me. Her laughter was of gaiety, intimacy, freedom, not of ridicule. I found that I was unafraid of her, but gazed without answering as if I had seen a vision.

Seeing how I stared, she ceased to laugh, but her eyes sparkled with amusement.

"Why!" she said. "Are you so surprised to see me here? I've been watching since you came in."

"Why did you hide?" I asked, forcing myself to speak.

This amused her yet more. "Hide! I didn't. I was in the window-seat. I'd let the curtains fall because you can't see the evening with the lamplight behind you. Then someone came in. I looked out and saw you. I thought——"

"Are you—are you Ned Fullaton's——" I interrupted; and stopped.

"Yes. I suppose I am Ned Fullaton's—or soon shall be," she answered with a changing smile.

"I thought it might be Ned. But it was you—and you looked as if you were walking in your sleep. Why did you kneel on the hearthrug like that?"

"I—I was reading the screen—and thinking," I answered in confusion.

"Of what?"

My arms were still raised, holding the curtains apart. They began to ache, and in an instant my whole body was aching. The windows swayed before my eyes.

"Oh!" she said swiftly, with a kind of mocking tenderness. "Are you ill?"

"No," I answered, "but I'll sit down, though."

I was about to let the curtains fall together when she checked me. "Sit here. It's cool. There. . . ."

She pointed to a place at her side. Without purpose, without thought even, I knelt on the seat so close to her that, when I thrust my head out of the window, the sweetness of her was mingled with the garden's sweetness. My breath came fast. Behind us, I knew, the curtains shut us off from the room, leaving us in blue-washed darkness. I could not turn to look at her again.

Evidently puzzled, little guessing the cause of my stillness, she said: "I'm glad we met like this."

"Like this?" It was more echo than question.

"Before the others came."

"Oh," I said, withdrawing from the window and looking up at her, "the others would have made no difference."

"To what?"

"To you. To my seeing you. To——"

Perhaps because the sentence was impossible to complete my thought drifted away from it to wrapt contemplation of her. She was shadowy as a ghost, rising out of the floor's darkness like a faintly luminous mist, with no substance but in the lovely neck and arms and the graceful carrying of her head. Yet, how alive she was! With what an exquisite burning she charged my blood! All my being seemed to have its boundary in her eyes; all my knowledge and anticipation of beauty to be gathered up in her. A shiver of fear and delight ran through me.

"You haven't told me what you were thinking of when you crouched there by the hearth," she said.

"About being young," I answered, and even the word, the sound of it, went to my head like wine.

"Are you much younger than your brother?"

"Nearly eighteen."

"I'm nearly twenty-one, that's young, too."

She said this with a doubtful sadness that I did not understand, nor did I attempt then to understand it. She had spoken to me in a secret tone, had admitted me to her confidence: I might have been given the keys of heaven. As if a mysterious sorrow had been communicated to me by her and had become my own sorrow, I wanted to hide my face in her breast. The imagining of myself doing so

frightened and overwhelmed me. I started away from her; my moving hand by chance touched hers. Awe, as if I had touched a holy thing, must have been in the breath I drew, for she rose instantly and opened the curtains. I saw her eyes clearly for the first time, long grey eyes under brows that seemed to be playing some laughing game.

"What a frightening person you are!" she said.

What did she mean? How serious was she? Did she speak to me as boy or man?

Others were coming into the room now. I shook Ned Fullaton's hand; I was presented to Henry Fullaton and to Clare's aunt, Mrs. Sibright, a stiff little lady with pointed nose and sandy hair, like an erect collie. At dinner, though I did not take her in, I sat next to Clare Sibright. I was silent for long periods in which chatter of Salvini and Madame Albani drifted lightly over me; then suddenly talkative, so that, to my utmost astonishment, I heard my own voice saying to Henry Fullaton: "The whole question is whether we can group light while we diffuse it, and, if it comes to portraits, then how we are to paint the mind and not the face only in terms of light. You see what I mean, Sir? You see what I mean?"

"I'll be blessed if I do, young man," said Mr. Fullaton. "But you sound as if you meant it."

As we walked up to the drawing-room, Richard asked: "Hi, have you been drinking wine, Nigel?"

"One glass of port."

"Good God," said he, "you do well on it."

My drawings were brought out for inspection during the evening and passed, with polite comment, from hand to hand. I was in no mood to listen attentively to what was said. When the drawings reached Clare she looked at them long and silently; then, as if she expected to find in my face an answer to a riddle they had suggested to her, she turned her eyes on me. At length she passed the drawings away from her without a word. Mr. Fullaton took them into a corner, whence, after an interval, he emerged, carrying them under his arm, wrapped again in their paper. He handed them to Ethel.

"Thank you, my dear young lady. That was very kind of you," was all he said.

But I did not care, or trouble to read meaning in his tone. The evening was all a dream, dazzling and breathless. In bed that night I pressed my hand over my eyes until the colours frothed and wheeled. I could not see her face, could not recapture it. But I knew that in the darkness, beyond my hands, were her throat and shoulders, so beautiful that I was afraid to look upon them, and I heard her voice say: "What a frightening person you are!" and heard her say again and again: "So you've come to life at last! So you've really come to life at last!"

Midway through the night I started up from sleep, staring, my hands plunged into the bedclothes behind me, wondering how all the world

was changed; then sank back into my pillow and slept quietly until a strange manservant awakened me.

The morning being overcast, there was debate at breakfast about the occupation of the day Until the coming of Mrs. Trobey, who, her husband said, was "sure to have plans," all discussions wore an air of speculative vanity, as if subalterns should plot a campaign in the absence of their chief. When she arrived, she gave us each by name a good morning, and settled briskly in her chair, which happened to be beside Mrs. Sibright's. The two ladies' caps of lace and velvet nodded together in their wearers' anxiety for each other's rest during the night; Mr. Trobey handed a cup which clinked in its saucer; there was a splutter of talk between Ethel and Pug Trobey; through the intervening silences came from across the garden a dog's distant bark.

"Is everyone here now?" said Mrs. Trobey with a determined smile.

"I am afraid my niece is not," Mrs. Sibright answered. "You must pardon her, please. She was, I know, very exhausted by her journey, poor girl. It so often happens nowadays that the young ones tire more easily than we who are older. A question of early training, perhaps."

"Pray do not excuse her," Mrs. Trobey answered graciously. "In this house I like every-

one to do as they please. Was not your hostess herself disgracefully lazy?" When this self-blame had been received with murmurs of polite deprecation and Mrs. Trobey had displayed her fine, even teeth, she turned with increasing archness to Ned Fullaton:

"And when your Clare does come downstairs, how do you two propose to spend the day?"

"I don't think we have anything mapped out," Ned answered.

"There!" Mrs. Trobey held up her hands. "Nothing mapped out? What opportunities young people do miss nowadays, to be sure!"

Ethel, anxious to please, here put in: "Didn't you speak yesterday evening of going to Derriman's Thicket some day if it was fine? We had such a lovely time there last summer."

Mrs. Trobey, who had observed as soon as she entered the room that her son and my sister were sitting together, threw towards them a glance of suspicion.

"Well," said she, as if a secret were being forced from her, "I *had* a little plan, but if anyone——"

"Come, come, my dear, let's hear it," said Mr. Trobey who knew the gambit.

"Yes, *please*!" said Mrs. Sibright, with a collie's smile.

"O *do*!" Ethel begged.

Mrs. Trobey, with a gesture, confessed herself

overwhelmed by these persuasions. "How would it be," she began, "if everyone went just as they please until luncheon? You, my dear"—she was looking at her husband—"could take Jon and Mr. Richard to fish the Galliard stream."

"Very well," said Mr. Trobey. "What do you say, Frew?"

My brother, looking through the window at the dull sky, said he would make a fly with a snipe's feather and give it a yellow body.

"Oh, my usual's good enough for me," Mr. Trobey replied.

"You walk up with us, Miss Frew?" Pug dared to suggest.

"Certainly, Ethel," Mrs. Trobey said quickly, "go with the fisherman if you like. But I was hoping you would come with Mrs. Sibright and me in the barouche. We would call at the Hopes' cottage on the way—you remember old Mrs. Hope last summer and how she said your eyes reminded her of her poor husband?" The fine, even teeth appeared again, and Ethel tittered mournfully at this old joke at her expense. "Well," Mrs. Trobey went on, counting on her fingers, "that's three men disposed of and three ladies. Would you, Mr. Fullaton, give us your protection during the drive? You don't care for fishing, do you? And I'm sure your son"—with a glance of middle-aged frivolity at the embarrassed young man—"can be relied upon to bring Miss Sibright to Derriman's Thicket either through the wood,

which is beautiful just now, or by the cut across the hill? What do you say to that, Ned?"

"That sounds charming. But what will Clare say?" Ned replied with a laugh that was a little uneasy.

"Oh, Ned!" Mrs. Sibright exclaimed, "you know she will be delighted."

"That's settled, then," said Mrs. Trobey. "Now, let me see, has anyone been left unprovided for?" She began counting on her fingers again and her roving gaze settled at last upon me. "Ah, you Nigel! A most important person forgotten."

I would have sunk through the earth, seeing myself outside all their grouping.

"You will forgive my calling you 'Nigel,' won't you? Really, I must call both brothers by their names, if Richard will permit it!—Thank you, Richard. . . . Well, Nigel, certainly you mustn't go with Ned and Clare. Two's company, you know, isn't it? And the barouche will be full. Let me see——"

"Nigel can come with us," said Richard. "He and I will share a rod."

At this old Henry Fullaton intervened. "If you'd allow me to make a suggestion, Mrs. Trobey, it would be this: let Miss Agatha have my place in the barouche——"

"No, no, we couldn't think of accepting your kindness," Mrs. Trobey answered. "Poor Agatha generally stays in her own room until luncheon.

In any case, it is best for her, I assure you, that she should rest during the heat of the day."

Mr. Fullaton shrugged his shoulders. "Her mother must be judge of that. It seemed a bit hard for the girl, that was all. I dare say she would like an outing for a change. But in any case, if you will excuse me, I should like to walk myself. I'll take the boy with me. What does he care for your fishing?" He put down his coffee-cup, sucked the superfluity of beard and moustache that curled over his lips, and glared in my direction.

"Of course," said Mrs. Trobey with a malice by which he was untouched, "you are professional brethren."

"The young men say that I am conservative," he went on, disregarding her and keeping his vigorous eyes on me. "H.F., they say, is an old fogey. Shuts himself up in his studio at Windrush and shuts out new ideas. Well, we shall see. That kind of thing has always been said. But we shall see. Unless I'm mistaken, we'll surprise 'em yet."

So obviously was he about to make a pronouncement of historic importance, so earnestly was his finger upraised to command attention from the whole table, that even Clare, who entered the room at that moment, paused on her way to greet Mrs. Trobey and stood, with solemnity on her lips and mischief in her eyes, mockingly spell-bound. Mr. Fullaton gave her one glance before he continued.

"That boy there is a genius. He will become a great master"—his voice slowed and deepened until it was like a muffled cathedral bell—"if he is taught. You keep a diary, Trobey?"

Mr. Trobey started in his chair as if he had heard himself addressed by name from the pulpit.

"What? A diary? Yes: just notes you know."

"Good," said Mr. Fullaton. "Then write in it under to-day's date that I said—that I confidently stake my reputation in saying—that this boy, of whom the world now knows nothing—— What is your name, Sir?"

"Frew, Sir."

"Tut-tut. I know that. The other name?"

"Nigel, Sir."

". . . That this boy's fame will be greater than my own—that the signature N.F. on a canvas will some day mean more than H.F. Write that in your diary, Trobey, and let posterity be judge. Some day it will be known whether, in his later years, Fullaton became impervious to new ideas."

"That is most generous of you," said Mrs. Sibright.

"Most generous, I must say," Mr. Trobey echoed.

Ethel, in the voice of an anxious prompter, reminded me that it was I of whom this large, bearded man had been speaking. "Well, Nigel," she whispered, "what do you say?"

The whole table was murmuring its tribute to

the famous academician's generosity, and he, leaning back in his chair, was tut-tutting and waving their honour from himself to me, when Clare, whom all but I had forgotten, came forward, tapped him on the head, and exclaimed:

"Good morning, John the Baptist. If I weren't so hungry, I'd sit at Mr. Frew's feet and sing the *Magnificat*."

"Clare!" cried Mrs. Sibright. "My dear child, what are you saying?"

Henry Fullaton himself had the good sense to laugh, though his laughter was comfortless. "Ah, you don't take me seriously, Clare. You think I don't mean what I say. Well, time will show. Time will show."

"Oh yes I do," she replied. "I take you more seriously than you take yourself."

At this Ned Fullaton, feeling that, as her betrothed, it was his duty in some way to call her to order, turned a flushed face upon her. "Come, come, my dear," he said, "a joke's a joke, you know."

She was walking round the table, but checked suddenly as he spoke, and looked at him with burning, contemptuous eyes. It seemed that she was about to rebel against his assumption of authority, to say something which, thus spoken, it might be hard for her ever again to recall. But she bit her lip and was silent. Fearing, perhaps, that he had gone too far, Ned said with conciliatory petting: "There—that's done with. Tea or

coffee, my dear?" and offered her a chair by his own.

Her anger past, she could laugh now. Shaking her head to refuse his offer, she took a seat at my side: "If I can't sit at the feet of the master," she said, "at any rate I'll sit next him to have my breakfast."

In all this there had been a false bravado that ran counter to my idea of Clare. I found myself making excuses for her: Fullaton had, indeed, been pompous and spectacular enough to invite ridicule. "Certainly," I thought, "he has seen work of mine—Ethel would show it to everyone last night—but not enough for judgment. Something in it may have surprised him and challenged his prejudice. So he plunged, for the fun of making a discovery. He wanted to startle the breakfast-table, that's all."

There was no credit in his praise. Its extravagance, its theatricalism, its blatant emphasis, spoiled it by making the praiser ridiculous, and Clare's taunt was so far justified. She had had every right to tease him when all the world was treating him with the solemnity he loved so well. But the manner of her taunting, her chatter about sitting at the feet of the master and singing the *Magnificat*, had in it something wild and hysterical that I did not understand. And how angry she had been with Ned! True, he also had been pompous in his reproof of her; if she had snubbed him simply I should have smiled and

rejoiced. But she had looked at him with wrath disproportionate to its occasion. She had looked at him with—hadn't there, for a moment before she controlled herself, been hatred in her eyes?

My mind leaping whither, I suppose, it wished to leap, I imagined that I understood. Hatred—wasn't that the key? She did not love Ned Fullaton. She was being forced into marriage by her aunt, and perhaps by Henry Fullaton himself. No wonder her nerves were on edge. No wonder she could not be gentle with Ned or his father. How eagerly my heart received that tragic explanation! She was a martyr, a victim. I ventured to look at her, hoping, I dare say, to discover tears in her eyes; and, though she was without tears, her expression, lighted by a flickering smile, was indeed a sad one, as if she were now ashamed of herself, but would admit her shame to none but me. There was no flattery like her mute pleading. I wanted to beg forgiveness for having, even fleetingly, thought ill of her, but I could do no more than smile back and continue, with a lump in my throat, the breakfast of a knight-errant.

"Is that a bargain, then?" said Henry Fullaton—it must have been the end of a conversation in which I shared while my thought strayed elsewhere. "Shall you and I take a stroll together? You give the old fogey ideas and I'll put you up to some of the tricks of painting 'em. What do you say?"

"I should like to come, Sir," I answered.

My brother, Pug, and Mr. Trobey set out with rod and basket soon after breakfast, and Ethel was carried off by the elder ladies to the drawing-room. Henry Fullaton disappeared to write a letter, promising soon to return, and I was left to wander about the library. A step into the hall, from which I instantly retreated, showed me Ned and Clare testing walking-sticks amid a flurry of impatient spaniels. I could hear them discussing the route they would take together. She was for the shorter way, he for the longer; she for open country, he for the woods.

"If it goes on like this," he grumbled, "girls won't be able to walk at all presently. You hang drapery all over you, but your dresses are so tight you can't move. All very well for Town, I dare say, but what are ladies going to do in the country if they can't take a stroll?"

"Sit at home, I suppose," she said.

"They're almost too tight to sit in," he answered bitterly.

Her laughter rang out: "O Ned, what a noodle you are!"

The door of the library was still open. I heard him persist stubbornly in argument, and began to wonder why Clare, who had seen me enter the hall and withdraw again, did not call me into conversation. "Surely," I thought, "she wouldn't

continue this dull wrangling with Ned if she remembered that she was being overheard. Ought I to walk into the hall again and show myself?" But I knew that, when I appeared, Ned's eyes would say, "Oh, here's that boy! What on earth does he want?" though his voice would exclaim: "Hullo, young Nigel, not gone out yet?" I should not know how to answer, and should be half afraid to meet Clare's eyes. Therefore I lingered, asking myself whether she had forgotten my presence, but knowing that she had not. She intended me to overhear this bickering between herself and Ned. There could be no other explanation, I thought. At breakfast, a hundred intimate graces of hers had seemed to say: "You and I understand each other, don't we? The rest are barbarians." Now, I imagined with a glow of excitement, she was adding, in pursuit of some subtle feminine design, to the secret understanding between us.

So well occupied was I by my own confused dreaming that I did not listen to their words, though I received a vague impression of outwardly good-humoured dispute with an undertone of dislike. Then their voices stopped. The silence caught my attention.

"There, I'll say I'm sorry," Ned began again at last.

"Oh, you're forgiven," she answered.

"Really?"

There was a throb of laughter in her voice.

"There's proof," she said, and I knew, as if I could see, that she was putting up her face to be kissed. A moment later—

"You're afraid!" she mocked.

"Afraid! Afraid, am I?"

Feet scuffled with clumsy eagerness. There was a little cry, stifled; then, after a long silence, Ned's heavy breath.

"Come on," he said with wine's exhilaration. "Let's get out."

Not until after the door slammed did I move. That little cry of hers, which a kiss suppressed, had been joyful, desirous, triumphant even. Had she intended me to hear that also? My body was tingling, but it was not physical jealousy I felt. What Ned had done seemed then to me not enviable, but simply a happening in another world and to another woman. I ran to the window in view of which they would pass as they rounded the house. There they were, walking together, with the sunshine, broken from a gap in the clouds, snatching at the swing of their shadows. Clare turned her head and looked at the window in which I was standing. I watched them until they were out of sight, but she did not look again.

I was still watching the gap in a belt of fir-trees through which they had disappeared when Henry Fullaton's voice sounded behind me.

"Hullo!" said he. "You look like a bird in a cage. Impatient, waiting for me? I'm sorry to have been so long. Bring a sketch-book with you. We may need paper and pencil."

During that walk I began to like Henry Fullaton as we all may sometimes like exceedingly vain men. There was a childlike pathos in his vanity. We had not gone a hundred paces before he plunged into eager autobiography. He had begun life with a determination to become a famous painter (the word "famous" he used without misgiving as if it were a hallmark of genius); he had worked hard, and had succeeded in "establishing a line" of his own. His pictures were reproduced in illustrated journals; little knots, he said, used to collect before them at exhibitions. "What has Fullaton done this year?" people would ask. Very early in life he was admitted to the Academy. He dined everywhere and knew everybody. "All the world," he said, halting by a five-bar gate and gazing across the meadows with melancholy eye, "lay before me."

Having learned that it was my duty to listen, I said nothing.

"Well, well," Mr. Fullaton said at last, "since you've heard so much, you may as well hear the rest. It will prove to you how fickle reputation can be. A very well-known, I may say a very influential, critic was among my close friends. Mark you, our friendship came later than his appreciation of my work—arose out of it, in fact.

He, too, had been a painter; looking back now, I dare say he was disappointed. Still, nothing of that appeared while our friendship lasted. No two men, you'd have said, could have understood each other better. Then, at the height of my success, just after I had been made an Associate, I married Ned's poor mother. Well, my old friend is dead now, and we mustn't think evil of him, but there are the facts—and facts speak. In the years after my marriage everything changed. Praise for my work became grudging—not his praise only, but others'. Critics will always follow a strong lead." He turned away from the gate with a sigh. "And ever since," he said, "the same critical attitude. Henry Fullaton is an old fogey; that's the upshot of it." And he added, as if this were conclusive: "Of course, my work hasn't changed, except that I have steadily learned more and improved my method. . . . I don't think my wife ever suspected that the man was jealous on her account. We never spoke of it, and, after the first shock, we never spoke of his criticism."

"But if the critic is dead, Sir, surely——"

"Ah! you'd think that, with his influence removed, the younger critics would form a fresh judgment, wouldn't you? Well, that's not the way of the world, young man—anyhow, not of the modern world. Criticism, like painting itself, isn't what it was. Just say without responsibility any clever-sounding thing that comes into your

head and, if you've nothing else to say, crib Ruskin—that's modern criticism. No system, no vigour, no independence. Besides, even though my old friend is gone and the personal feud ended, if you once give a dog a bad name it sticks to him. I have a bad name. Great technical powers, but no vision. Coloured photographs—that's the accepted word. 'Mr. Henry Fullaton exhibits a subject picture painted with his customary smoothness and skill. It will please his many admirers, who would be disconcerted by any variation in his somewhat sentimental formula.' Twenty years on they'll be saying the same thing about Fildes and Herkomer, who are the young lions of to-day."

Mr. Fullaton laughed loudly, as if to dispel his own seriousness and to say: "Of course, in my inner mind, I know that this tale of a critic's jealousy of my wife is all nonsense." I remember nothing of our walk together more clearly than that burst of harsh laughter; it came from a man torturing himself who would not admit his self-torture. He had made himself believe in this critical conspiracy to cheat him of honour and, though his common sense discredited it and made it useless as consolation, his pride would not let it go. He wished to persuade me of its truth so that current criticism should not swamp my judgment. He wanted my praise; he longed for nothing in the world so much as the discipleship of young men and the hope of immortality it

would give him. This I understand now, for there is no other explanation of his hungry eagerness for my company and approval. At the time, though startled by what I recognized as a failure of balance in one who presented to the staring world so firm a complacency, I did not try to explain it. I thought: "That's odd. What's wrong with the old fellow?" and returned to my own meditations.

So it was throughout the morning. He discoursed to me with great learning of the Flemish painters and their methods of work. He dragged from me some statement—heaven forbid that it should be recorded against me—of what he called my "theory of luminous masses." We sat together on a bank while he drew in my sketch-book, assuring me that Doggin was anatomically wrong in what he had taught me of wrist-movements. I perceived at once that he was pouring out knowledge of the highest value to me and strove to bring my mind to bear. It was all in vain. I was no technician that morning. What I saw of the sketch-book was a dapple of leaves and sunlight on the page—how the pattern shifted, how it danced, with what chill melancholy it faded away. Over our boots, as we plodded on, splashed the mud of the night's rain; water-drops sprinkled my hot hand as we thrust our way through branches. Ahead of me, Mr. Fullaton talked and talked, shouting if I lagged behind and turning once, when I had forgotten to shout back "yes" or "no," or "how do you explain that, Sir?", to

exclaim that I was very silent, and to offer, with hearty *camaraderie*, a penny for my thoughts.

My thoughts? I was exploring childhood for its treasures, searching my heart for its sweetest memories; I was running out to old age for its content and gathering in all the harvest of imagination; I was aching beneath the natural touch, the yield of earth, the leaves' contact, the wind's softness under my hair; I was bringing together all the precious gifts to man, save only disillusionment, that I might make of them one gift and cast it at her feet. At whose? If I knelt at her feet and looked up, what face should I see? In thought, I did kneel and did look up. The face I saw was Clare Sibright's, yet it wore no expression of hers that I had seen. It was a face of compassion and yearning and awe; it looked upon me as a virgin might look upon the Christ-child in her arms. It emptied time of cruelty, and beauty of affliction; it filled me with desire to give all into her keeping that all might be safe. Yet it was the face of Clare Sibright that I saw.

"My thoughts?" I said, for I had to give some answer. "Oh, I was just feeling happy, that's all."

"Happy?" He waited until I had drawn level with him. Then, looking searchingly at me, "Ever been in love?" he asked.

I flushed, and could only repeat: "In love?"

He squeezed my arm in a brotherly way. "It will do you a world of good," he said, as if recommending a medicine.

Until that moment it had not entered my mind that I was "in love" with Clare, partly for the conventional reason that she was engaged to Ned, but even more because the phrase, possessive and personal, did not match my own truth. I had been ready for love as the earth in sowing-time is ready for seed; my art, preparing its creative energies, had been seeking a point of concentration; Clare had suddenly emerged. I had been exalted and at peace, full of gifts and an ardour of giving. Now I was aware of conflict. To be "in love" was to be hungry, jealous, in peril. I had been both proud and humble in her presence, humble before the new life she represented, proud of my participation in that life. Now, when we came to Derriman's Thicket, and found a white cloth spread upon the grass, and Clare against a background of shredded clouds lazily drifting, there were moments in which I was ashamed. They were neither many nor long; I returned from them soon with a feeling of escape. But while they lasted I could not bear to be parted from her, and, if she smiled, or by chance touched me, I trembled as if in fever. From others this may have been concealed. It was not from her. She was evidently amused, and treated me with new favour and interest. And, in a dispute about height, she made me stretch my hands above my head and herself did likewise. Her finger-tips touched my palms; our bodies swayed to a light contact; she sprang away with eyes dancing.

"Well," she cried to the three anglers who had just approached, "have you caught anything?"

My brother opened his basket and let her examine it. Over her shoulder he was staring at me. I supposed that everyone knew my secret and looked wildly from face to face. But Ned had paused, fork in hand, to laugh with unsuspecting good-humour; for him I was but a boy with a boy's privileges. Ethel had not even troubled to glance at me or Clare. Kneeling on a cushion with her back to me, she was taking care that Pug should have the delicacies of the feast.

"What I like when out fishin'," said Mr. Trobey unexpectedly, "is bread and cheese and a little cider. All this—" his gesture included the barouche, the servants, the spread tablecloth, and Mrs. Trobey herself—"all this seems out of place. . . . Have a good walk, Miss Sibright? You look as if you were enjoying yourself."

When I went to my bedroom that evening to dress for dinner, I saw a pencil lying on the mantelpiece and remembered that it was with this that I had been sketching at random before going to my first encounter with Clare. It had lain there unobserved for twenty-four hours. "Twenty-four hours!" I thought. "Is it no longer than that?" Carrying the pencil to the window, I began to sharpen it. The trees were emptying themselves

of colour, and the faint scent of a dying bonfire drifted in from the garden.

The sound of a handle being turned made me realize that an instant earlier someone had knocked at my door.

"Come in," I cried, and the pencil slipped to the carpet.

My brother entered, wearing a dressing-gown and slippers, but otherwise dressed for the evening. At once I remembered how he had looked at me while Clare was examining his fishing-basket. "He has come to question me," I decided, and in a panic of secretiveness prepared to resist.

"Thought I'd come to see how you were getting on," he began. "Good Lord! haven't you started dressing yet?"

I threw off my coat and waistcoat and made haste with my preparations. Mrs. Trobey was giving a dinner-party, for which, Ethel had warned me, I was to be "extra smart."

"Who's coming to-night?" I asked from inside the shirt I was pulling off.

"Not many. Don't be so terrified, Nigel. People like you, though you'll never believe it."

"Who likes me?"

"Oh, everyone so far as I know. Old Fullaton, Mr. Trobey. . . . What you need is more confidence in yourself."

"Older people often do like me," I said.

"Well, so do Pug and Ned."

"What did Ned say?"

"Just that he liked you, I think."

"That's because I'm your brother."

Richard shrugged his shoulders. "What about Clare Sibright? You've made quite a conquest there, you know."

I plunged my head into a basin of water. When I emerged, Richard was speaking calmly of the dinner-party. Lord Singstree, who was none other, he explained, than Drooper of the mandolin and four-in-hand, would come over from Singstree House, bringing with him his mother and Miss Eleanor Drooper, his sister. "She's a joke." Richard said. "As lanky as Drooper himself. And, if Mrs. T. can manage it, she'll be a joke at poor Pug's expense." Half a dozen other guests would drive in from the countryside. Richard quoted Mrs. Trobey—" 'Quite a nice informal little party. We shall be just twenty at table, including poor Agatha. Such a treat for her, poor girl!' " After dinner more guests would arrive, and all who were young enough would dance.

"Shall I have to dance?" I asked.

"Of course," Richard laughed. "Don't you want to?"

"I'm no good at it."

"Quite good enough. Ethel and I have taught and taught you. You're always like that—never want to try anything. It's the same with skating."

These social shortcomings of mine had been discussed a thousand times at home, by Richard

generally with tolerance, by Ethel sometimes with a stinging contempt.

"I suppose it's the things I'm no good at," I said, "the things I shouldn't ever do at all if I weren't your brother and Ethel's."

"What would you do, Nigel? Just draw and paint?"

"I suppose so. You see, very few people like me at once, particularly in a crowd. I'm much happier with one or two people who know me well. I can talk then about subjects that go on and on, instead of continually finding new ones and losing them again as one does at a dance."

"But that's a form of laziness. You'll never be any good as a painter if you can't be easy with people."

"As a painter—why not?"

"You'll have to talk to them when they come to have their portraits painted, won't you?"

"You mean, to keep their expression and thought alive?"

"No, bless you, Nigel—to amuse them. How many ladies do you think will give you commissions if they are bored in your studio? This house is deuced good training, if you'd only see it that way. Don't you want to be popular and to get on?"

"I don't know." This attitude was new to me. "I can't make plans like you. I haven't a scheme of life—the kind that Father talks about. But I want to paint and be left alone and——"

"What about marriage?" Richard asked suddenly. "You'll want to marry some day." I think he went on to explain that I should not be alone then, that I should have to be sociable for my wife's sake, and that I should need to earn money. But I scarcely listened to him.

"When is Ned Fullaton going to be married?" I demanded.

"Next month—the end of August—why?"

"I wondered. . . . It seems odd to think of their becoming settled like Mother and Father, or knotted like Mr. and Mrs. Trobey. They seem to have so little to do with each other now."

"Little? They are always together."

"I know. But she doesn't seem to belong to him."

"She's a queer girl," said Richard, and I waited for him to continue; but he pursued in silence his thoughts about her and came out unexpectedly with: "Ned's madly in love with her."

"And she? Isn't she?"

Richard looked up at me as if trying to decide from my face how much he might with propriety say. There was a suggestion of a smile on his lips —the smile, known so well to me, with which older people were accustomed to break off discussions of women in my hearing.

"In her own way, she loves him—anyhow wants him," Richard decided to say at last. His smile broadened for a moment before it disappeared. "Ned's a handsome fellow. Must be attractive to

generally with tolerance, by Ethel sometimes with a stinging contempt.

"I suppose it's the things I'm no good at," I said, "the things I shouldn't ever do at all if I weren't your brother and Ethel's."

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"She's a queer girl," said Richard, and I waited for him to continue; but he pursued in silence his thoughts about her and came out unexpectedly with: "Ned's madly in love with her."

"And she? Isn't she?"

Richard looked up at me as if trying to decide from my face how much he might with propriety say. There was a suggestion of a smile on his lips —the smile, known so well to me, with which older people were accustomed to break off discussions of women in my hearing.

"In her own way, she loves him—anyhow wants him," Richard decided to say at last. His smile broadened for a moment before it disappeared. "Ned's a handsome fellow. Must be attractive to

girls, apart from Windrush and all that." He had been arranging my tie for me, and now clapped me on the shoulder. "But you've made the romantic conquest, Nigel. You'd better cut him out!"

My impulse was to escape from Richard into silence, to risk no more of his jesting; but I feared that silence might serve only to reawaken the suspicion that had fluttered in his eyes above the fishing-basket. I had, too, a habit of seeking his worldly judgment.

"I don't think she's happy," I hazarded, speaking as lightly as I could.

To my astonishment he answered seriously: "I doubt whether she is. She's so up and down. And yet," he added, "probably that's all nonsense. Most girls are on edge just before they're married. She'll settle down after a month or two. Do her good and give her colour. . . . I dare say Ned isn't what she'd imagined as the love of her life. She's being sensible, and it's a bit of a strain. She's bound to be sensible. The Sibrights are well off, but she's only their niece, and they've hosts of children of their own."

I wanted to remind him that he himself had just now admitted that she was unhappy, and press him on that point, but I dared not. He was tugging my waistcoat into position and adjusting the hang of my coat.

"You'll do," he said. "Come along to my room while I finish. Then we'll go down together if you like."

As we went through the door, I asked, "What did you mean—it would give her colour?"

The old smile returned to his face and broke into laughter as we went down the passage.

When my brother and I entered the drawing-room before dinner I found that preparations for dancing had changed its appearance. It seemed now large, bleak, and overlighted. Some of the furniture had been taken away and the rest thrust back against the walls; all but two rugs were gone, leaving an expanse of glittering floor with a little sociable stranded in its midst. No guests from outside had yet come, but a group of those living in the house was gathered round the mantelpiece. Mrs. Trobey and Clare's aunt were seated; Mr. Trobey was stretching his neck in his collar and, as if there were a blaze in the empty grate, elaborately warming his coat-tails; everyone was forcing conversation to kill time. The evening's entertainment had conspicuously not yet begun.

Standing on the edge of the group I thought: "Here's an opportunity to put life into the proceedings," and racked my brains for something to say, without having, in fact, the least intention of saying anything unless someone spoke to me.

What would I not have given at that moment to have been able to break in with light-hearted talk that would have set everyone laughing at its brilliance! But I was tongue-tied. When Henry

right, disregarding custom as she always did, calmly examined a silver spoon and took no notice of anyone. Between them I sat very comfortably, protected by their inattention, free to think, "I doubt whether Agatha is as odd as she pretends," and to observe that the roses before me were reflected, not only in metal and glass, but in the glossy tablecloth. How, I wondered, would Henry Fullaton suggest that in paint? An image in a mirror was one thing; this altogether another. For here it was necessary, while borrowing colour from the reflected flower, to preserve the opaque whiteness of the reflecting surface and to suggest, beneath the stiff gloss, the texture and pliability of linen. It seemed an exciting problem. Squeezing a fold of the cloth under the table, "It's the pliability," I thought, "that Mr. Fullaton would miss"; then, looking up and taking in for the first time the general scene, "And how much more he'd miss!" I began to perceive humour in that dinner-table's constantly changing pattern, and to smile inwardly at it. The movements of the diners —their polite inclinations towards each other as they spoke, their bodily uprightness and twisting of their heads as food was handed to them, their swaying stiffness as of a row of solemn dolls buffeted by light gusts of wind—were repeated and caricatured by the shadows on the wall. I thought: "Suppose an eruption buried them now and preserved them for two thousand years. Suppose, when some antiquary of the future dug them

out, everything was perfectly preserved—the glitter of shirt-fronts, the low gleam of bare shoulders, the polish of finger-nails, the charming, the formal, the pompous, the facetious smiles. How the antiquary would pity them, frozen for so long in their convention, but how, within the awe of pity, he would laugh!" It was his view of them, the view that springs from laughter within pity and from pity within detachment, that I should have wished to paint; and, seeing the general company with his eyes, I saw Clare also as he would have seen her. To him, would she not be but one of a group, frozen and remote as they all were? Would he not fail to understand her, as when we walk through a churchyard we all fail to understand, of the unknown inhabitant of a grave, that once she was the centre of the living earth, that once there was no scent but in her nostrils, no sound but in her ears, no shade or sunshine but protected or warmed her? Would he not forget, as we forget who on a tombstone count the inscribed years, how she once knew her youth to be eternal and smiled away death?

So vivid and intense had this imagining become that, when I broke free of it and found myself again a present guest with her, I seemed to have restored her from death to life. I had leaped forward two thousand years and returned. There was no longer importance in the convention of the hour. The criticism of my family, my fear of displeasing, my persuasion that I was a child and

Clare a woman bound by a thousand ties to a world by me unattainable—all these were forgot. There seemed to be no other in the world but she and I. We were free of responsibility, save to ourselves, as a man and woman would be who were raised from the dead while all whom they had known remained in ashes. I imagined myself rising from the table unperceived, standing at her side with no eyes but hers awake to me, and saying: "Look: all these, though they smile and glitter, have been dead two thousand years. All this is over. You and I remain." And I saw her —ah no! ah no! not her airs and graces of this evening, but the wisdom of childhood recaptured, the wonder of a virgin whom the spirit visits— I saw her give me her hand, as an inevitable trust, and go out with me into the air, which blew upon our faces like the wind of swords.

At that instant she turned from Ned, to whom she had been speaking, and looked down and across the table as if someone had called her. She was puzzled; there was sadness in her expression, as though she could not find what she was driven to seek. I felt rather than saw her eyes' discovery of mine. What she read in them I do not know, but the glitter she offered to the world went out of her face, leaving a deep stillness of beauty that I never saw again. In a moment it was gone. Her brows moved to a light questioning, the corners of her lips to a smile.

Suddenly I heard Agatha say: "Do you love

her so much?" and I rounded on her in challenge that was instantly dissolved in wonder. It was as if she had newly sprung up at my side; as if her existence had at that moment begun. Hitherto I had thought of her vaguely as of one whose life could have no contact with mine; she had been no more than the elder sister of Richard's friend. Now I saw more clearly.

"Or didn't you know?" she asked.

Still I hesitated, drew breath, tried and failed to lie. "How did *you* know?" I said at last.

"Your face."

"You mean, I gave myself away—to everybody?"

"You gave yourself away." She smiled now. "But not to everybody."

"You're not laughing at me, though."

"Laughing!" She spoke the word quietly, but with scorn of the world that might laugh at what she had seen—a scorn which, in a girl outwardly so mild and colourless, was like a burst of flame within a room. "You see, I'm not one of them, perhaps because I'm an invalid."

There was an irony in that last phrase which, though I felt its presence, I could not then interpret. The voices of the others, the shirt-fronts, the shoulders of the women, the reflected roses, were beginning to become apparent to me again; my attention slipped away from Agatha to them. Miss Drooper spoke to me for the sake of speaking, and I replied for the sake of replying. When I came

back to Agatha, the recollection of what I had experienced while gazing at Clare was like the recollection of a dream, and Agatha herself was quietly speaking of customary things—of the countryside through which I had walked that day, of dancing after dinner.

"Shall you dance?" I asked.

"No; I shall watch them begin—then slip away. I shall sit in the nursery. It's really my sitting-room, you know. I paint there."

"Oh," I said, "so the pictures——"

Her eyes swept over my face, but she did not force my silence.

"Sometimes it's fun after a dance," she continued, "after bedtime, I mean, when the guests from outside are gone. I hear the carriages crunch away over the gravel and everyone coming upstairs to bed. Then I go to my room and undress—then go back to the nursery and wait. The men go off to Jon's den and smoke and talk, I suppose; and the girls, well, sometimes they go into one of their bedrooms. If they do, I don't follow them. But sometimes they come to the nursery and sit round the fire. But that's generally in winter. I keep up a large fire. That attracts them." She added, with an appearance of afterthought, "Clare Sibright may come this evening. I wonder. Her room's next door."

I said nothing to this, and was surprised when she asked, with a sharpness of interrogation: "Did you know she was sleeping in the old night-nursery? It's wrong that she should."

"Wrong?"

"It always seems to me wrong," she said, "that the night-nursery should be used as an ordinary bedroom. After all, we children are still sleeping on there. I should like to die there. Then it would be as if I'd never ceased to be a child and Jon had remained always a little boy."

She was now so far away in her own thought that she paid no heed to Mrs. Trobey's signals of withdrawal. Not until the rising of all the ladies commanded her attention did she stir. Even then she remained seated an instant longer than the others—long enough to say to me: "But Mamma will decide that some other room is more healthy for me to die in."

I watched Clare going from the room, and knew that she avoided encounter with my watchfulness. There was bliss for me in that avoidance and the acknowledgment implied in it. I began to think with a sort of triumph: "Even Agatha doesn't know—" and again I saw myself alone with Clare, the world dead, we only living—joined in an act of escape. Then there rushed in a thought, which seemed not to be mine, but imposed upon me, that the companion of my escape was a woman. I saw limbs move, the tension of muscles as in a drawing, the tightening of the breast by the backward arm. A drawing now; and now a woman; and now, blindingly, Clare.

The ladies were gone; the door was shut. Someone pressed the cold glass of a port decanter against my right hand. Looking round, I saw Ned Fullaton, who had crossed the room and taken Agatha's vacant place. The discovery of him so near to me was at first a shock; I wondered whether he also had seen in my eyes what had been so plain to Agatha.

"I was looking at you during dinner," he said, "and thinking how much you and Richard were alike."

He had come, then, with no darker purpose than to be friendly to Richard's brother; this was an opening politeness. Here he stopped, wondering how to be affable to so strange a youth. All life was for him plain sailing towards the pleasures and responsibilities of a country gentleman. He was what, if any men were plain and simple, one would call a plain and simple man; he was aware, at any rate, of no complexities in himself. He had, however, a contempt for "narrow views," and was determined to be "interested in" the work and thought of men whose attitude towards life startled him by being different from his own.

"I want you," he said, "to tell me about your art."

He spoke as he might have spoken to a small boy who had been flying a kite. "I want you to tell me about your kite." The tone was, I am sure, no comment on my own inexperience. He would have used it to Michelangelo himself; it was

completely free from conscious arrogance. He wished to be informed, to "see the other fellow's point of view," to keep an open mind. But he knew that he would be bored by his lesson.

A little bewildered I asked him what he wanted me to tell him.

"Well," he said, knitting his brows, "what I can't make out is why some of these artists *will* paint what they don't see. Some of these pictures —I don't remember their names—aren't like anything, are they? They aren't to me. Now, you tell me—I'm open to be persuaded—what are these fellows driving at?"

It dawned on me that Ned's chief motive in asking these questions was to please me. He was giving me—and again he would have acted as generously towards Michelangelo—an opportunity to chatter about my toys. I chattered, but with more embarrassment than pleasure. What I might have said could not be said at all without personal revelation which, I knew, he would consider equivalent to a stripping in public. My answers were, then, dully formal; I am not surprised that he shook his head over them.

"But portraits," he said, "what's the good of a portrait that isn't a likeness?"

"But a likeness to what?"

"To the sitter, of course."

"But to which sitter—the one you see or the one I see?"

It was in my mind to say that a portrait should

be an image of one spirit received in the mirror of another, but a glance at the plain man's eyes checked that didacticism. He was not aware that I faltered.

"How do you mean—'which sitter?' " he persisted. "For example, suppose you were painting a portrait of Clare. There she was at table—you could see her, so could I. Isn't it plain enough?" An idea painfully struck him. "Oh!" he exclaimed. "I see what you mean. You mean that it's not simply a question of features—nose, mouth, eyes, and so on. You mean it would depend on how we saw her character. Is that it?" He was greatly proud—attractively proud in a stolid, boyish way—of this stroke of intelligence. He sipped his port, drew his chair closer, looked into my face with the curiosity of one who is asking another's opinion, certain to be favourable, on some treasured possession. He could talk of Clare now; was delighted to have found so good a pretext.

While he continued to speak of her in his confused, laborious way, I found myself wondering what it was that made him attractive to her. Richard had said that she was "being sensible," but, of a woman so fastidious as Clare, that seemed not to be the whole truth; Richard himself had hinted that it was not. I searched Ned's face for an explanation better matched with her nature. He was big and strong, too coarsely built to be a good athlete—a bull of a man. Brown hair, with a short, crisp wave in it, grew thick on a square head. Cut

shorter than was then the fashion, it ran to a central point low on his forehead, a broad, flat, stubborn forehead that seemed to have been moulded rather than cut. His features, regular enough to be called handsome, had all a bluntness, not of fat—for he was healthy and well exercised—but of natural shape. There was not a clear angle anywhere; even his ears clung to his head as if they were made of clay and had been pressed into position by a slovenly thumb. . . . Dull to draw, I thought, and, observing the uniformity of his prosperous colour, dull to paint. . . . But while he spoke of Clare, there was something amusingly humble and earnest in his eyes—a quality that was of the essence of him, and set him apart from other plain, simple men. What he wanted to talk about was her body; what he felt compelled to talk about was her mind. Just as he did not understand, or care for, art, and for that reason drove himself to inquire about it, so he did not understand Clare and, therefore, was extravagantly proud of his association with her. For him she was a valuable mystery. He prized her as a rich man without learning may genuinely prize a work of art for which he has no natural taste. Ned had certainly a natural taste for her physical beauty, though even this was sharpened by his feeling of surprise that anyone who was so baffling in speech should be so delightful when kissed into silence; but the spring of her influence over him was, as I began now to understand, her

rarity value. It flattered him to love her. It made him feel that he couldn't be such a dull fellow after all if he wanted a woman so brilliantly distant from him.

"You see," he said to me, grasping my arm to clinch his argument, "she's completely different from other girls. There's no one like her in the world. I often wonder what she sees in me."

Was it precisely this that she "saw" in him? Was it this adoration, as of a great clumsy dog, that had won her by its comic unexpectedness? Or was Richard's explanation enough: "He's a handsome fellow. Must be attractive to girls—apart from Windrush and all that"?

How much of this analysis of Ned's, and so by implication of Clare's, character belongs in truth to the Nigel Frew who sat at Mr. Trobey's dinner-table in 1875, I do not know. Some of it may have been imposed upon him by the older self that writes now with a full knowledge of what came after; but a great part of it was his, and, I am afraid, not to his credit. Certainly I rose from that table feeling a little puffed up by my own insight and marched out of the room very much a man of the world. Henry Fullaton had said that I was in love; Agatha had said it; and yet—how could that be if I was thus able to observe Clare and Ned with such clever detachment? I would conduct myself calmly, I decided, as we walked across the hall; I would not behave like a child. The phrase "calf-

love" rang in my ears as a challenge. I held myself straight, swung my arms, swaggered a little. Miss Sibright was waiting for us to dance with her. I would dance with her, and sit in the window-seat where I had first discovered her, and laugh over it all. In my thoughts Miss Sibright was now the name that I used.

But the part of a man of the world which, if they but knew it, makes fools of most men, was never very gracefully mine. As the drawing-room door opened and the sound of women's voices came out, I was frightened and ashamed to discover myself in so dismal a masquerade. My shoulders slackened and loneliness swept down upon me. Who was the Miss Sibright of whom I had been thinking? Who was the remote, hard, critical youth in whose thought she had been so frigidly examined? Not Clare; not I. Clare was before me now, and though, when she saw me, her eyes seemed to have some deep questioning in them as if she wished me to go to her side, I could not approach her. In that company, in the crowd that surrounded her, amid the rise and fall of voices and the interruptions of laughter, there was nothing I could say or wished to say. Passing her by with a look that made her smile—"the look of a frightened monk," she afterwards told me—I propped myself against the wall in a corner by the fireplace, hoping that I might be left alone there.

The music began and I had no partner. Not

daring to look up lest I should see an unpartnered girl and be compelled to ask her to dance, I swung myself sideways and stared at the fire-screen. Suddenly there was a little rush of feet behind me. Clare, leaving Ned to grin his astonishment at her behaviour, had broken away from a waltz and was standing close to me.

"Are you going to ask me to dance?" she said.

"Oh," I answered, "yes—yes, I——"

She shook her head. "Don't you want to dance?"

Something forced me to speak the truth. "Not with you—not now——"

"Not with me!"

Unaware that her misunderstanding of me was but a mocking pretence, I stammered in explanation: "You don't think that I—— What I meant was that to dance in this crowd—with you—after——"

"After what?"

I looked at her helplessly, incapable of saying that in her company there must be no other world than hers, and, while I looked, she read my answer.

"Oh, Nigel, God bless you for that," she said, quietly and swiftly. Then, in an instant, she was away, dancing, looking out from Ned's shoulder

"So she also knows that I love her," I thought, and, forgetful of what had been sad in that recognition, yielded myself to its sweetness as a swimmer to the sea in which he cares not whither he swims.

The room in which I stood was transformed. I was filled with a vitality, a boldness, an eagerness for action and sensation such as I had never before known. The music—a piano and a fiddle played swooningly by two anxious ladies brought in from the village—this music, which a moment before had been irksome to me, became an enchantment; the dance I had feared, an intoxication; the candles, the glitter of a fantastic dream. How I asked them, how they answered, what words were exchanged between us I do not know, but with girl after girl I danced, thinking not of them, not even of Clare herself, but of happiness, as if happiness were independent of earthly circumstance, as if it were the only reality instead of a spurring illusion of the soul. Sometimes, when music ceased and feet were still, I would fleetingly remember myself—who I was and with what necessities hedged about. Ethel would speak to me—"I told you you would enjoy yourself!"—and my home at Drufford would spring up before me and my heart grow cold. Sometimes, as I danced, Clare's face would pass before me, and the sight of it, like a wind upon a fire, would send my new-found wonder leaping in fresh flames upward until all existence—not mine only, but all existences within and beyond the grave, all feeling of body and ecstasy of mind—seemed caught up in the burning. She, who was an origin in me of so much that was greater than either of us, was then not an object of desire, but a centre

of revelation; and I a puny creature left behind by a greater self soaring upon wings not mine. I danced without knowledge of the dance; spoke without care for speaking. I was an automaton whom I myself had transcended. There was neither flesh nor trouble in me.

Then—the automaton, I suppose, having asked no girl to dance with him—I found myself alone, outside the room, running, with ever-increasing exhaustion, through half-lit passages. I stumbled against the nursery door and entered.

"May I come here?" I asked, and, before Agatha could reply, demanded again: "May I come here?" and sat down at some distance from her and stared at her—with how much wildness I can but guess.

"You had better talk," I heard her say, "or cry, or pray, or sing."

It was the first of many conversations with her, for afterwards I went often to the nursery, which seemed more friendly than any other part of the Trobeys' house. That evening it was her mother who interrupted us. With two companions, very young men whom I did not know, she came down the passage, laughing and talking so that I hated her.

"Ah, there you are!" she cried, standing resplendent in the doorway. "I thought so. Agatha, you ought to have been in bed long ago. I can't have you monopolizing the genius of the party."

They were about to have supper, she said. I was dragged off, feeling very awkward and uncomfortable because I could not titter at her jokes or cap them as the young men did. I supped, and danced again. At last the evening came to an end. We went out into the porch to watch the guests drive away, and stood among the dull, sickly scent of ferns. Through the open doors I saw the sky, touched with the pallor of day's approach, and against it a tall fir-tree, cut, it seemed, out of blackened tin and propped against the clouds.

The oil-lamp of a carriage, casting its weak light through the stained glass of the porch, spread a triangle of violet on the flesh of one of the girls standing near me. Unlike the others, she had not covered herself with a shawl. Though the night was warm, the porch was colder than the house, and her skin, within a few inches of my eyes, was ruffled. She shivered and ran away to fetch a cloak. We—we, that is, of the household and those guests who were awaiting their turn to go—were in a close group. It was necessary to move to let her pass; and, moving, I came near to one who, I knew without looking, was Clare. It was her hand I saw. The glove had been turned back at the wrist and, under cover of the crowd and the half darkness, Ned was holding her hand and paddling in it. His fingers strayed up her arm above her glove, within her sleeve. As if she felt nothing and cared nothing, she permitted it;

then, slowly, without his knowledge, she turned her head towards me and whispered: "When are you going to begin my portrait that Ned talks about? To-morrow?" Her breath touched my face. With scarcely a movement I could have kissed her.

I remember the sparkling earnestness of her expression as she spoke. My reply, if I made one, is lost; perhaps the group broke up then and I had no opportunity to answer her. Not until next day did I discover that her words had been firmly intended. Ned had told her of his conversation with me after dinner—how, with an imagined portrait of her as a basis of the game, we had "played at character drawing"; certainly he had expected her to laugh and think no more of it. Instead there had arisen in her mind the idea that I should paint her, and, she persisting, Ned had yielded. "Clare's awfully keen that you should have a shot at her," was the way he put it. Though he must have grudged the time that the process would occupy, he made his offer with good grace. He'd be the one to give Richard's young brother his first commission. Agatha's painting stuff was in the house. Would I use it? How would twenty guineas do?

"A good price, as things go," Henry Fullaton put in. "But you mark my words, Ned, your descendants will say you made a first-class bargain."

"Isn't it odd," said Clare, "to think that we are

discussing now a picture that doesn't exist, but may some day be known all over the world?" She tried the sound of it: " 'Portrait of a Lady,' by Frew!"

"Why the anonymous 'Lady'?" Mr. Fullaton asked.

" 'Portrait of Clare Sibright,' then. My immortality!"

"Anyhow," Ned observed, "it will be 'Portrait of Mrs. Fullaton,' my dear."

Clare laughed at that. "The catalogues will say: 'Number 99. This was one of the earliest of the artist's important works, begun in 1875, when he was not yet eighteen. Commissioned for twenty guineas by Mr. Edward Fullaton, son of Henry Fullaton, R.A., it represents his wife, formerly a Miss Sibright, and shows a frivolous but not unattractive young lady of the period. Little is known of her, and it may be assumed that her later life was principally domestic, for her tombstone in Windrush Church records that she was the mother of nineteen——' "

"Clare!"

"I'm sorry, Ned——" Then, suddenly serious, she turned to me. "But do you consent?"

I consented at once. It had never been in my mind to do otherwise. To have refused any commission, even if it had seemed unattractive to me, offered by Ned with Henry Fullaton's approval, would have required an artistic self-consciousness that was not mine. Only in secret did I think of myself as an artist, and then not with arrogance

towards other men; to the world I was a young man trained to do what was expected of me and not to give myself airs. Once the Fullatons had resolved that I should paint Clare's portrait, the question was decided for me. But it was not, I saw, decided for Clare. She was standing with her arm in Ned's. Her eyes sought mine with genuine anxiety as if she were ashamed of having, in her jesting speech, assumed so much. She did doubt my consent; she silently pleaded for it, and pleaded with an unmistakable humility that seemed to be a contradiction of all her imperious ways. When I said "Yes, of course I'll try," there was gratitude in the look she gave me, and relief that was more than gratitude. It entered my mind that she had been afraid that I might refuse, but I did not know why.

Afterwards she came to me alone. The others were indoors, waiting for luncheon, and I had wandered out on to the veranda for a moment.

"Tell me something. Will you tell me the truth? . . . Do you *want* to paint me?"

"Of course I want to."

"No, no," she exclaimed. "Please don't answer like that. You are not a boy being polite to a lady. You're an artist who has had a subject suggested to him by people who don't know—who have no right—— Won't you help me? Don't you see what I'm trying to say? I don't want to be—for you—the woman who sits in front of you and has to be painted for twenty guineas."

I flushed with shame. Was she saying to herself: "This silly boy thinks he's in love with me. To paint me may be an uncomfortable business for him. Perhaps I'm being cruel; I must let him off."

This I imagined to be in her mind and was made angry by the patronage, the pity of it.

"Why do you suppose that—that whatever I feel about you personally, I should be afraid to paint you?" I asked.

There was puzzle in her eyes, a momentarily dazed expression as if she had been struck. "What do you mean? I supposed nothing of the kind. . . . Oh! have I hurt you in some way? I didn't mean to. I meant——"

Her tone compelled belief. We stood gazing at each other, recognizing that we were at cross-purposes. Then, with a slackening of tension, we laughed misunderstanding away.

"It's my fault," I said. "Will you tell me what you did mean?"

"It's only feeling with me," she answered, as if forcing her way with difficulty through a press of thought. "It's feeling, not criticism. It has nothing to do with what Ned's father said of you; his opinion isn't one I trust. But I feel that you are not an ordinary painter—anyhow, that you will not be—and so——" She broke off and began again more quickly and lightly. "You remember," she said, half smiling, "what I said about No. 99 in the catalogue? 'This was one of the earliest of the artist's important works. . . .?'

The rest was a joke, but I meant that. I believe they will talk about you in that tone some day. It's not by work of yours that I judge—at least, not principally by your work; I haven't seen enough; anyhow, I'm no critic. It is by you I judge —you yourself. Whether you are or will be a great painter, I don't know. But every instinct I have in me tells me that you will be a great man—perhaps in poetry, perhaps in painting, if painting is your final choice, perhaps in the way you live. And I wanted you not to paint me unless—unless you saw something in me that you yourself wanted to paint."

While she was speaking a flood of contradictory thoughts swept through my mind. I had always mistrusted strikingly gay and beautiful women; my outward timidity had been accentuated by their outward brilliance; never before had one put aside the social mask and opened her mind to me. The experience was sweet and flattering. For a moment I basked in this new intimacy, this pleasure comparable, as I know well, to the amazed pleasure of a shy man who finds himself welcomed. From this happy mood I slipped into a kind of awe. I felt not so much that Clare was praising me as that humanity was making its demand of me. I remember thinking: "When I'm old I shall remember this and, if I've failed, wish that I was young again. Well, here I am young now—all the years ahead—the old man's wish fulfilled, as it were. I must not fail." I asked

myself what, in old age, I should count as failure. Would the absence of fame be failure? Would lack of achievement, even, be failure? "Perhaps in the way you live," she said, "you will be great." Did she fully intend that superb philosophy of quietism? I was so young then that my active spirit rebelled against it. To achieve, to create visibly before the world, was an urgent need in me. I was filled with a passionate desire to paint her portrait—passionate, in all truth, for the desire had in it at that moment the hunger of a sexual passion. It was as an artist, not as a man, that I wanted then to possess her, and to possess, in her, beauty itself of which she had become representative. And as sexual longing, if not of a beast, falls back, submerged in worship, before the being loved, and the act of seizure becomes an act of aspiration, so, looking at her now as the being to be painted, I fell back before the mystery of her. But I would say only, with the nervous faltering of the boy I was, that all my life I should be trying to paint what I saw in her and what was hidden in her—what I hadn't yet the eyes to see. She answered with a swift intelligent look, but I felt thwarted because I could not convey to her all that was in my mind.

Her hand clenched on the veranda railing.

"I am right," she said, "and you know it."

She said this with a hint of triumph—almost of the childish arrogance of a woman who believes

that she has "made a discovery." The tone chilled me, and, when we were with the others again, I wondered in silence, half shrinking, half admiring, at the change of mood, to me incomprehensible, which enabled her to chatter freely, even of the portrait itself.

"Does it mean," said Mrs. Trobey, "that you are doomed to sit for hours in that nursery when the sun is shining outside? What does Ned say to that?"

And Clare replied with a challenging movement of her head: "Oh, Ned knows it's the cleverest bargain he's made in his life."

It seemed scarcely to be the same woman speaking of the same subject.

On occasions such as this, when some freak of outward behaviour ran counter to my imagining of her, I was at once shocked and delighted. Nothing could now affect my faith in her beauty and merit, or prevent my discovering in the idea of her, whenever I dwelt steadfastly upon it, that compassion and tenderness and fortitude for which I was athirst. When, therefore, she paid the world in its own coin, when she boldly outfaced a callousness that would have driven me into nervous silence, the effect was to make more precious my own precious secret. The contradictions in her dazzled and sometimes hurt me like the flash of sunlight on deep water that is set about

by rocks; but I was fascinated by them because I knew, as none other did, what depth was beneath the sparkling, what profoundness of peace lay there, so that one might plunge into imagination of her and yield oneself, like a diver in a miracle, to perpetual discovery of new twilights and of colours that had but remote origin in the outer day. I knew, in my choice of Clare, a swimmer's joy; I would brace myself for the plunge, leap clear of earth, cleave the sparkling surface, and, with a rush of bubbles against my flesh, sweep downward and downward in an ecstasy of farewell to the world. Then, suddenly, I would ask myself, "How did I begin this diver's dream?" and remember Clare.

This, which was happiness so long as my need was to love her, became a baffling and tossing of the mind from the moment that I took pencil in hand. Painting is a contemplative as well as an executive act. To paint a portrait is to discover the springs of a life; to know by what courses the streams come down from the hills of childhood; to perceive how, and with what earthly stain or heavenly reflection, they are gathered together in the torrents of youth; perhaps to guess a little of the seas to which they go. But, as this contemplation has a material fruit—or else is the picture dreamed of, not made—so it can be no infinite wandering, such as love is whose delight is unending search, but must somewhere conclude. It must conclude, before the portrait can

justly be begun, not in intellectual understanding of the subject, for understanding can proceed only from a knowledge of past facts that may be hidden from the artist, but in an imaginative synthesis which is satisfying to him. It is not necessary to the peace of a religious soul that its wisdom be perfect; it is necessary that its faith be sure. So an artist need not be all-knowing, but of his own vision he dare not remain in doubt.

When I began to consider Clare's portrait, there was uncertainty in every face to which I could compel my imagination. I would see a thousand aspects of her in a thousand ways expressed, and each clearly; but no one picture that was she. If I had been content with what is called likeness, what Coleridge called "the external mark, that in which Tom is different from Bill," I should have had no need to delay, but I was seeking "the inward humanity" or, as I would rather say, spirituality of Clare. Some of the drawings I made then are still preserved; they reflect my vain searching. Though they have a maturity beyond my seventeen years, and there is neither vagueness in them nor slurring of difficulties, they make my difficulty apparent. It was, then, and has always been my practice, before attempting a drawing that should embrace the detail of modelling, to test the clearness of my thought on a subject by restricting myself to plain line. I would try, with Holbein for master, to suggest all that may be suggested by variation of the

weight, direction, and continuity of line. "If you do this," Mr. Doggin had told me, "you will know, beyond possibility of deceiving yourself, whether you are in possession of what you are trying to draw. A good-looking sketch in charcoal might conceal your ignorance from you; like red chalk, it's flattering stuff. But when you draw in plain line, if your mind isn't clear your hand stops. It is a preliminary self-examination in which you can't avoid an issue; you have to speak straightforwardly or be silent." My sketches of Clare are evidence that I was not "in possession" of her, for there is nowhere a completed drawing of her whole face, or even of the most vital parts of her face. There is a study of her folded hands, an elaborated and finished study that bears no mark of hesitation. There are studies of an ear, of her hair and throat, of her arms in sleeves not unlike those now worn by men. These were drawn happily and without faltering. But eyes, lips, and the face itself, all ardently begun and all abandoned, repeat themselves in my book like apparitions in a nightmare of struggle.

The household at Lisson could not understand my difficulty. Ned, standing impatiently behind me, would comment: "It's queer, but it's like her. What on earth's holding you up?" Ethel, anxious that I should not fail, would exclaim: "But the likeness is wonderful, don't you think so, Mrs. Trobey? Why don't you go on with it, Nigel?" Pug Trobey, during his rare visits, always whistled

his contempt for this "wastin' of time." They were all anxious, as soon as it was begun, to know when the portrait would be finished, and it was only when they pressed me on this point that I discovered how fantastic was the project in my mind.

"When you've done your preliminary studies, what next?" Henry Fullaton demanded, and I found myself telling him, as if there were no limit of time, that I should then transfer my final drawing to canvas, and make there a complete underpainting in monochrome. Upon this was to follow a succession of glazes and dryings in the sun, and afterwards——

"But the Lord preserve us!" said Mr. Fullaton. "Clare will be away on her honeymoon before that."

Even then I did not realize that the scattering of the Lisson party would rob me of my sitter in a few days. I began to explain to Mr. Fullaton, with great earnestness, that I hoped by my proposed method to obtain an inward glow which could not come from the direct application of opaque colour to canvas; but I feared that I should not succeed fully because Agatha's canvas had a prepared lead ground, and what I needed was an absorbent ground of either plaster or gesso.

"Yes, yes, young man," old Fullaton interrupted with a roar of laughter that astonished but pleased me, "but will you kindly look at that calendar, and remember that Mrs. Trobey didn't ask us here for the rest of our lives?" Then

he added: "Who taught you to paint like that? By Jove, it's a queer thing to find a young fellow on that track. Mind you, I don't agree. It's not simply that nowadays we haven't time —as you'll learn if you try to make your living as a portrait-painter—but we have—well, other aims."

"So have I other aims," I began. "The old technique up to a point, but an entirely different treatment of light and a different surface. You see——"

"Steady, steady," he broke in. "What is it—Holbein with a dash of Monet? . . . But, look here, this interests me. What do you say to a week in my studio at Windrush some day? Two artists of different schools might learn something from each other—eh?"

After that he came often to the nursery, and would sit watching me, and go away without speaking a word. His silence comforted me, for I felt that there was recognition in it, and I struggled on without swerving from my own plan, deaf to the general pleading for a swift likeness, and caring only for perfection with the passion of one whose life was before him. I cannot reconstruct a diary of those days. A few scenes remain, important or unimportant, tragic or absurd, preserved by some freak of memory from the gulf of the past. From them arises an impression of a world struck by magic, of summer scents and sounds and silences which took on, in those brief

hours of enchantment, the meaning which even to-day is inseparable from them. Earth has never been so bright again, so free of limitation, so brimmed with adventure and the excitement of being alive. I knew when Henry Fullaton showed me the calendar that Clare's portrait could never be finished, but I did not reckon by the calendar. There was no calculation of the future in my mind; no counting of days or balancing of circumstance. I did not ask to what my love could lead me, or remember that the portrait could have no completion. It was enough, it was all life, to love Clare and to draw her; the many hours in which I was but the youngest of Mrs. Trobey's guests, hours tormented by an abnormal shyness, had not the substance of life. Every night, exhausted and happy, I would fall from a half-dream of my mysterious portrait into the dreamless sleep of a child, and every morning awake with a sweet anticipation of joy. I had no being save as an artist and a lover. It was for me as if Clare and I dwelt already in a world within the world. I think I tasted then a little of the peace that à Kempis promises to the single-hearted.

Only Agatha knew of that inner world's existence. Even Clare did not fully know, did not guess how high were the walls I had built round it. But Agatha knew, and knew also that within my secret world I was fighting with a mystery of individuality as well as of portraiture.

"I believe I know," she said once after a pro-

longed scrutiny of my drawings when Clare was not in the room, "I believe I know better than you do what's troubling you—why you can't go on."

I waited.

"You are trying," she continued, "to discover tragedy in a happy face."

I drew my breath, held it an instant, then asked: "What tragedy?"

"That's for you to say. The tragedy is in your idea of Clare, not in the Clare we know."

"You mean that I'm wrong? I'm sentimentalizing her—is that it?"

Agatha did not reply at once. She walked to the window and stood before it. "Perhaps her tragedy's in the future," she said at last, "and you see it now. I believe that great painters have been able to do that." She turned abruptly. "Do you think I'm mad?"

"No."

"Not even as mad as Cassandra?"

I gave no answer but a shake of my head.

"Then listen. I'll tell you the truth. You have idealized her, and she—she's not a great woman really; she can't let genius live by its own light—she has romanticized you. You are searching in her for the subject of a great spiritual painting. It isn't there, I tell you. But you've made her want it to be there. You've made her want everyone to see in her what you are trying to see; you've made her want to see it in herself. She'll never

be content again with any friendship or affection or worship except the kind of worship you give. She's seen the mountains; she'll despise her own little hills. She'll never be content with Ned again, but she won't break free from him because—well, because the girl she was before you came still wants him. And, as for you—why, don't you hear her saying to herself: 'Perhaps he's a genius. How wonderful to be the woman that inspired him! And he's never loved before. How wonderful to be loved in that way!' You struggle to discover holiness, a kind of tragic holiness, in her, and while she sits there, watching for your eyes, she's flicking the pages of your biography and reading about herself."

"You hate her," I said.

Agatha looked at me in helpless alarm, as if she had spoken, not of her own will, but under compulsion, and was now for the first time hearing her own words. Then, with sadness and exhaustion, she passed her hand over her eyes and downwards over her chin and throat.

"No, I don't hate her. In a way I love her, too, for your sake. But I've made you hate me. You don't believe a word I've said, and you'll hate me now—always."

Her eyes fled from mine. As if a weight had crushed her, she sank to the window-seat, staring away from me into the garden.

It was true that I did not believe her; still less do I believe her now. She had, indeed, gone

beneath the surface of Clare, but not deeply enough. The emotion which shook her, and which held me speechless because I knew that it was I who had caused it, had led her into a conventionalized distortion of the truth she had discovered. But in saying that I was trying to discover tragedy in a happy face she had given me a key. My mind leapt to it. I understood for the first time that Clare was unhappy, that the tragedy which I had dimly perceived in my idea of her was already throwing its shadow upon the living woman. The tragedy—and here Agatha's perception was false—was an inward one. That quality, the search for which had strained my drawing and yet had filled my heart with peace and gladness, was present in Clare; but only now had she begun to be aware of it, to wish—with a longing of the soul rather than of the mind—to give it expression in her life—now, when it seemed already too late. She was deeply committed, not simply to marriage with Ned, but to a way of life of which that marriage would be but an incident. All this I saw as one recognizes a face, not feature by feature, but with swift, complete acceptance. From that moment I began to see Clare, when she sat before me, as one who, scarcely conscious as yet of her state, was slowly awaking within a prison.

While I worked, deep silences would fall between us, broken only by the purring of my pencil, or, perhaps, by the footfall of some gardener

who passed beneath the open window. These silences she would often break by asking—as if her troubled thought turned perpetually thither—whether I agreed with the world's estimate of her—whether, in short, she *was* what she was supposed, and had always supposed herself, to be. Her questions were spoken in a half-mocking tone, as if she cared nothing for the replies. "Am I a 'frivolous but not unattractive lady?' " she would ask. Or "Nigel, is it true that I'm an actress?", or "Tell me, do you think Ned's father is right—am I 'a deuced fine thoroughbred, not easy to ride or drive?' " Agatha's quick, long eyes would slide a glance towards me which said, "That's what I told you, isn't it?" She did not understand that Clare was asking these questions, not of me, not of the world, but of herself. They were not invitations to compliment; even less—for pain was in them—were they a part of the soft vanity of self-discussion; they were the openings of confession never pursued. Having asked, she was at once ashamed of them, laughed my answers away whatever those answers might be, and hid her own seriousness in a cloud of gaiety. But I received from her manner an impression of confused sadness. She was awaking to captivity, I said; it seemed that she was going through a darkening forest by a path which had begun to frighten her, and that now and then she turned her face over her shoulder and, in these questions, implored help.

In speaking of her as "awaking within a prison," and as walking through a forest of increasing fear and darkness, I have echoed the language of fairy-tale. The language springs naturally from recollection of the mood, for my intimacy with Clare had all the character of a veritable spell. I did not desire her as men desire women; I was not jealous of Ned Fullaton. Our intimacy, the greater because neither had ever spoken of it, was a magic and excluding circle thrown round us when we were alone. It ceased when we were in contact with others; then she was a brilliant girl in my brother's set, and I nothing but a shy boy on the fringe of it. But when in the nursery, or in my dreams, or during my solitary walks, the spell again descended, I lived in a timeless bliss, free of cause or consequence. Even Clare's unhappiness, when first I became aware of it, did not at all demand that I should, by any scheme outside the spell, seek a remedy. Though I saw her imprisoned, and my whole spirit yearned for her liberation, it did not enter my mind that I, Nigel Frew, my brother's brother, my father's child, should challenge the world for possession of her. Her unhappiness was a new aspect of beauty in her, a discovery of a new depth, an enrichment of my own ecstasy.

This impassioned detachment, this aërial suspension of being, the first consequence of love's first onrush, could not long endure. For a few

days Clare was herself a world; in it I lived, and could see her in relation to no other. The trees, the sky, the sunlight belonged to her; the silence of night was her sleeping; the scents of the air were fresh with her freshness; twilight told me only that she was gentle and daybreak only that she was young. That she was mortal woman of a flesh that suffered and would perish I did not know until, by a stroke of chance, my love was converted to her humanity. Then I saw her anew and loved her anew, and was swept by realization that, while I had dreamed a dream, a woman had entered into my world—the world of my boyhood, my weakness, my puny fears of ridicule, my habit of childish submission—who had changed me I knew not how, and had made me a stranger to myself.

This change did not come to me until my last night at Lisson, but one day earlier there was a prelude to it. We had begun the morning of that day in the nursery, she in her chair, I at my drawing. Ordinarily a patient sitter, she was restless.

"Is it of any use to go on?" she asked.

"Any use?"

"You are still not satisfied with your drawing? You haven't even begun on canvas."

"No, but gradually——"

"Gradually! isn't this the last time? To-day's Saturday. On Monday you go."

I saw the end with a kind of sick fear. A picture

rose before me of myself standing by my unstrapped luggage in my bedroom at Drufford. I heard our gong sound for dinner with the three final bangs that a succession of parlourmaids had given to it ever since I was a little child.

"There's to-morrow," I answered.

Clare shook her head. "Church to-morrow morning. . . . This is the last sitting. I'll stay if it's of any use. If not——"

I laid down my pencil. "You're right," I said. "It's of no use now."

She rose from her chair, hesitated an instant, walked to the window, and there sat down, resting her chin on her hand.

"I wish it wasn't ended," she said.

"You liked being drawn?"

"I have liked being in this room."

I waited, thinking she was about to say more, but after a moment's silence she sprang up.

"Let's go out." Then, swift on a thought that had not been in her mind when she began to speak, "Let's walk all day and get food at some cottage, and come back when we are inclined."

I stared at her, remembering that Ned would expect her to walk with him. But she had no care for Ned.

"It would be good—just once—to get right away!" she exclaimed. "We'll tell no one we're going. We'll leave them to wonder." And she added with a quickening of her speech: "Shall we pretend we're never coming back?"

What would have come of that suggestion I do not know. Perhaps we should never have gone. She was standing close to me, and looking at me with eyes lighted by a sparkling that had something of desperation in it, but her thought, I knew, was not with me personally. She was planning an escape for escaping's sake, and was enjoying in imagination the consequent chatter of the Trobeys and Ned's heavily tolerant annoyance. Perhaps the impulse would not have carried her into action; perhaps, if we had started, she would have tired or thought better of it, and have given up the game almost as soon as it was begun.

"Shall we pretend we're never coming back?" she repeated, and while an answer—what answer, I wonder?—was being shaped in my mind, the door opened and a maidservant entered.

"Mrs. Sibright, Miss," she began, looking nervously from Clare's face to mine and from mine to the drawing that confronted her. "Mrs. Sibright says, will you please speak to her in the Master's study? And—and I was to say, if you please, that, picture or no picture, you was to come, as Mrs. Sibright wished partic'lar to see you. 'It's of importance,' she said, Miss."

"Very well—— But wait. Where did you say?"

"Master's study, Miss."

"Mr. Trobey's room?"

"Yes, Miss. The Master's out. Mrs. Sibright went there from the drawing-room to speak with

Mr. Ned, Miss. Now he's gone out after the Master and the other gentlemen. I think may be, Miss——"

"Thank you," Clare said. "Tell my aunt that I shall come at once."

The maid, a young country-girl not yet well enough trained to have become a machine, hesitated before going out. While she lingered, with shuffling, uncertain feet, there was curiosity in her eyes and the flicker of a smile on her lips. It gave her satisfaction to be the instrument of so peremptory a summons. She perceived crisis and scented scandal, but she had no alternative to going. Clare allowed the door to close and footsteps to retreat down the corridor. Her body was taut; colour ebbed and flowed in her face. She was like a defiant and eager boy.

"That may decide it!" she exclaimed. "I wonder——" Her expression changed so rapidly that I could not tell what emotion—hope or anguish, or a kind of delighted alarm—predominated in her. "Well, who knows?" said she, and was gone from the room.

I did not see her again that morning, but I understood—partly from her own manner, partly from a recollection of past signs, the significance of which had hitherto escaped me, but which now all pointed to one direction—that her engagement to Ned Fullaton was in danger. At luncheon I perceived, or imagined, a vague stress in the general manner as if there were present in all

minds some unwelcome and constraining thought. Clare herself was without lustre. Soon after the meal she set out to walk with Ned. Never had she consented so submissively—her submission had an air of abject surrender—to a plan of his. The ultimatum which he had delivered to Mrs. Sibright had not been without effect. Clare was fighting no more.

"Well, she's made up her mind," Richard said. He and Pug and I were standing outside the porch to see the walkers start.

"About time, too," Pug answered, blowing a thin stream of smoke into the air. "Ned consulted me, you know, before going to Mrs. Sibright. I advised him to have it out. It's the only way with girls like Clare. If you don't, they play fast and loose with you for ever. Must pin 'em down."

I could neither interrupt this conversation nor escape from it. I heard my brother say that perhaps Pug was right.

"Though if you ask me," he added, "I think Ned was more put out than he need have been. I dare say she jollied him—it's rather a temptation with Ned—but she intended to marry him."

"Because of the money," said Pug.

"No. She wants him in spite of herself. At least, so I think. Ever watched her dance with him? He's a handsome fellow, you know."

"Oh I dare say," Pug admitted. "But the way she dances isn't anything to go on. It isn't only

when she dances with *him*. I've noticed myself. . . ." He thrust his head forward and began to whisper.

"Ah!" said Richard with embarrassment and a hint of dislike in his voice, "but you're a handsome fellow, too, Pug. . . . Anyhow, I don't particularly envy the man who has that girl, as you say, 'pinned down.'"

"Ned wouldn't notice it," said Ethel, who now came out from the porch, with Mrs. Trobey and Clare's aunt a few yards behind her. I fell back from the group, hot with young indignation. How ignorant and blind they were! What right had they to discuss Clare as if she were a creature without a soul? What right had her aunt to coerce her? I looked in Mrs. Sibright for a malice that was, in fact, entirely foreign to her. I thought that she had been guilty of an infamous cruelty and was surprised to find no evil in her appearance. Her face, though like a long-muzzled dog's when she sniffed the air, became harmlessly smug, like a quiet, dignified pig's when she drew in her chin to her neck; and her fingers, pale and wrinkled, with long nails ribbed and steeply arched, were innocently occupied with a large spectacle case in silver filigree which dangled on a silver chain. At these I continued to stare, numbed and baffled, until my gaze became fixed, and Ethel, who was always irritated by abstraction, advanced a step and playfully waved her hand across my eyes.

"Wake up, Nigel."

I could have struck her. "Oh," I cried, "why can't you leave me alone? Why can't you——" There I stopped, trembling and dumb, and saw all their faces turn towards me with shocked inquisitiveness. Only in Richard's expression was there any indication of reluctance to press me. The features of the others, and particularly their eyes, seemed enlarged and multiplied. I might have been shut in by a hostile crowd. I felt as I had so often felt at school, when a group of boys surrounded me and my back was to the wall, that my present torment might endure always and that I should never escape. But here escape was easy—surprisingly easy. All that I had to do was to walk away and hear Ethel exclaim: "Well, I never!" and Mrs. Trobey answer with a quick clicking of her tongue.

Having escaped, I did not return to them that day, except when meals made return inevitable. They decided, and said, that I was disappointed because I had failed in Clare's portrait. "But that's no reason," Ethel pointed out, "for behaving like a bear with a sore head."

"What's the matter with you, old man?" Richard asked when we encountered on the stairs as we went down to dinner. I could not explain to him the final hopelessness that had suddenly invaded me when Clare and Ned had gone out together that afternoon—how I felt that something had ended in the world. I wanted to tell him, but could find no words. I wanted to say: "I love

her! I love her, you see," but the thought of saying it choked me.

"Nothing," I answered.

Late in the evening, after the ladies had gone to bed, we gathered as usual in Pug Trobey's den, a littered place of tobacco jars, smokers' tables, saddle-bag chairs, fringes, and photographs. The meeting did not last long. Henry Fullaton was aloof and sleepy. Pug Trobey's favourite subject —women—had an awkwardness in the presence of Ned, who chattered resolutely of vintages. No one smoked more than a single pipe. Soon, after pulling back the curtains to inspect with foreboding a gloomy, starless sky, we took our candles and separated.

I was stirred before sunrise by the sound of rain. My blinds swung and snapped in angry gusts; water chuckled in the pipe that ran beside my window; a Japanese paper fan that stood in the grate was noisily attacked by drops falling down the chimney. I stared at the pale ceiling and listened; then, driven by an intolerable melancholy, slid from my bed and, through the slats of a blind, looked out into the garden. Light had begun to prevail. There was a glistening among the sodden purple of the firs, and, from a thousand facets of wetness, the gravel threw up the first cold grey of morning.

Though I soon began to shiver, I remained at

the window, watching the sky mistily lighten, and shadow slip down the trees like a dress. Soon, I thought, I should be looking out on to the trees at Drufford. Lisson would be an unquiet memory —an opportunity that I had allowed to slide away. Always I should remember the bliss that had borne no fruit, and should say: "Why did you do nothing? Why did you allow her to become a ghost?" I became obsessed by the thought that this was my last day at Lisson, and that there was something—I know not what—that it was urgently necessary for me to say or do; something that should save me from going back tamely into the submissive boyhood of my life at home.

Throughout the day this obsession never left me. I wanted some great crisis to break the dreary lifelessness of those final hours, but there seemed to be a paralysis of my will. While I cried inwardly for escape, I knew not what I myself meant by escape, nor was there, I think, in my manner the least mark of rebellion against the Sunday routine of the Lisson household with its food and satins and morocco Prayer Books, its playing of the piano, its standing beside streaming window-panes, its listless wandering from room to room, its well-fed sighing, its somnolent eyes, its reiterated protests against rain.

Only once during that dreary afternoon was I alone with Clare, for the nursery had been generally invaded. While she was coming upstairs, I was at the head of the flight, and stood aside to

let her pass. "Now!" my heart cried as she approached, "now speak—or never." She raised her eyes as if she expected me to speak, but, though my lips moved, I had no words, and would have allowed her to go in silence. She did, indeed, pass me; then suddenly returned. I had gone down two stairs and she stood above me.

"Was there something you were trying to say, Nigel?"

"No," I said, feeling that the world was falling about me, "there's nothing—that is, there's nothing that it's any use to say, is there?"

She hesitated, stroking the newel-post with her fingers.

"Are you going to be an artist?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes."

"You'll let nothing stand in the way? Not your father? Not Oxford? You'll be a great artist then. Will you promise?"

"What?"

"That nothing shall stand in your way. Promise that to me."

"Why," I said, "to you?"

"Because I want to feel that even—— Oh! because I'm a coward myself; I don't want you to be a coward."

I mounted the stairs until I was level with her. When my hand touched hers, her body shook and her eyes for a moment closed.

"Clare, Clare," I said, "are you so unhappy—more unhappy than you can bear? I may be a boy now, but some day. . . . Couldn't we, in three or four years, when I've had time to make my way, when I——"

"Three or four years!" she answered. "Or seven or eight. Or nine or ten. Things don't work out like that, Nigel."

"But I would work as I've never worked. And I love you Clare—oh, Clare, there can never be anyone in the world. . . . If I let you go, there'll never, never——"

She drew away her hand. "Is it me you love?" she asked, "or just your idea of me?"

"Do you love me?" I begged. "Is that why you called yourself a coward? I didn't dare speak until then. I didn't know. Is it true, Clare? Do you love me?"

"Isn't it enough," she said, "that I'm a coward?"

I knew, as if it had already happened, that in a moment we should have parted; that I should be on my way downstairs and she would be out of my sight. I had lost her and knew it. Because I had not the courage to face that loss, I wanted, with the sentimentalism that is in all despair, a form of words to haunt me; I wanted to hear her say the words that would most torment my memory of her. It was the mood in which we keep for our agony souvenirs of the dead.

"Will you tell me," I pleaded, "will you tell

me once—no matter what happens afterwards—will you tell me: do you love me now?"

She would not answer; but I told myself that her silence answered.

"Let's say good-bye," she said. "To-morrow, when others are there, and they're waving handkerchiefs—that won't be good-bye. Say good-bye to me now."

Her hands were at her sides; her lids were fallen. Though I knew that thus, for an instant, she yielded herself, I could not take her in my arms. I felt that I stood on holy ground. I wanted to kiss, not her lips, but the hem on her garment.

She looked at me again and said: "Oh, Nigel, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Do you love me like that?" and her tone was of fear and wonder. She must have been, after all, as young as I—capable of the same unsmiling seriousness at which, when we grow older and have lost the power of it, we fools pretend to laugh. She raised her brows in a kind of rapt questioning. An instant later she was gone.

I went on down the stairs. As I crossed the hall, Mr. Trobey's head appeared in the doorway of his own room.

"Tea ready yet, d'you know?"

"Not yet, Sir."

"Still raining, I suppose?"

"Yes, still raining."

So hour by hour the day passed in a house full of cold shadows and ticking clocks. It seemed strange that the lives of others should thus placidly

continue, so strange that I found myself listening to their talk as one listens to the dialogue of a play that fails to maintain its illusion. When night came I was glad. In my bedroom, packed luggage lay open on the floor. Though rain had almost ceased, the sound of water continued in the roof gutters. I could have believed that the darkness was still the same darkness in which I had risen before sunrise, but, when I went to the window and peered out again through the slats of a blind, I saw the gravel sparkling beneath a moon near to the full.

While I was undressing I remembered that my drawings of Clare were not yet packed and resolved to fetch them from the nursery in the morning. Though I lay down on my bed I could not sleep, but continued to think of these drawings and to imagine myself going next day to retrieve them at just that hour when Clare had been accustomed to begin her sittings. Would it not be better to rise and go to the nursery at once? My last memory of the room would then be a solitary one, and I should be able to forget how it had been filled by strangers throughout that Sunday of rain.

With a dressing-gown wrapped about me, I crept along the passage. Though I took a candle, I did not light it, lest it might show beneath the doors I passed and invite the curiosity of someone who lay awake. Within the nursery there was no need of a candle, for its curtains were drawn back

and it was flooded by a moon that retreating clouds had now fully uncovered. Beyond the garden, filled with a stiff intricate pattern of small bushes and ghostly fruit-trees, a row of poplars widely planted marked the ascending line of a hill. Shapes of sky between them were given an especial brilliance by their contrasted dark. "To-morrow," I thought, "when I am gone, no one will sit here and look out. But if the evening is clear, the gaps between the poplars will be as bright, and I at Drufford shall try to remember them and to dream myself back to this place."

Above the poplars the sky swept upward and upward. I let my eyes travel across that washed emptiness whence the clouds had sped so fast, leaving no trace but a frozen wisp here and there that seemed engraved upon a glassy dome. I let my eyes travel at first in attempt to record what I saw, determined that it should remain vivid for ever and not fade like all else into an obscure past; but soon I forgot to seek for memorable forms and began in spirit to journey in the sky—to climb and look down from a great height, from an infinite height of freedom, on the pattern of the garden, on the poplars and their hill, on the house where all lay sleeping, and on the face of the boy who leaned from the window, looking out and up. And I asked the boy why, having youth and strength in him, he wondered and submitted; why he also did not take the rungs of heaven in his hands.

There was then a faint sound which struck upon the ears of the boy in the window with a music to which his pulses replied. It was the sound of wheels on the highroad and of hooves urgently beating. It whispered, increased, declined, and was no more than a rhythm of silence. Nothing remained on earth but the little talking of foliage and the occasional spit of a water-drop. But I was in the sky again, looking down upon a highroad whereon, it seemed, the vehicle I had heard was a dark fragment of speed itself, a journeying miracle of escape that fled through valley and over crest. I followed it with eager eyes. I was transported to it, heard the harness creak, smelt the leather within, rocked in the wild motion. "Away! Away!" I cried. "For ever away and for ever free!" But when I leaned out of the window of that vehicle, its motion ceased, and I saw neither hills nor rolling valleys—only the close pattern of the garden, the rigid poplars, the shining sky.

"There is no miraculous escape," I said. "The world isn't like that." "The world isn't like that," I repeated to myself, and suddenly became aware that this was one of the profound delusions of the world. "The world is free," I said, "for those who are not afraid of the world. If, instead of returning to Drufford to-morrow, I were to go my own way, I should not die. I should be alive and free. A fresh life, my own, would grow up about me." I began to play with the idea, saying: "To-

morrow it shall be. To-morrow . . ." but knowing in my heart that nothing would be that was not to-night.

The wisps of cloud had vanished. The movement of the air had ceased. The foliage was silent and the last raindrop had fallen from the eaves. It was as if the soul had gone out of the earth and there could be no revival of motion or sound. Out of this stillness there came what seemed at first not sound, but a noiseless pulsation of the night. It continued and became sound, stifled and mournful, which, as a thing uncomprehended, touched me with fear. My body stiffened; I held my breath. It ceased and rose again, now to distinct hearing and recognition. From the window on my left hand, Clare's window, came the throbbing of quiet, unappeasable grief—a throbbing made terrible by its persistent secrecy like the secrecy of an animal that has hidden itself to die.

An impulse, not pre-eminently of pity, but of exaltation, seized me. Never, with the same absolute sureness, was I sure of any action of mine. Thinking not of the intrusion, not even of her need of comfort, thinking only of herself with a kind of excluding simplicity which drove from my heart all doubts and judgments, I went to her door and opened it and entered her room.

"You!" she said, but she did not question or blame me.

She had been seated in a low chair at the bedside; an indentation of the coverlet showed where

her head and arms had been pressed. Seeing me, she rose, but not to challenge my coming. A full, heavily draped gown of grey and silver now covered her, and her hair, in its natural fall, threw a bar of shadow on her cheek. She approached me and, putting both her hands in mine, remained still and silent. There was no other thought in my mind but that she and I, who were together now, need never again be parted; that already there was created around us a world which was ours only. Her acceptance of my presence seemed an acceptance of the mood in which I came, and her placing of her hands in mine an endorsement of it.

"I heard you crying," I said.

"It was the thought," she whispered, "of the one precious, impossible thing slipping away for ever, Nigel. There'll never be anything like this for me again. . . . O, my darling, I know that well enough. Don't think I can't see."

"Listen," I said. "Nothing has slipped away. There's time yet. To-morrow——"

"To-morrow?" she said, but I was heedless of the warning note of fear in her voice.

I went on with blind conviction. "Why should we wait even until to-morrow? We won't stay and argue with them on their own ground. Think, Clare, here we are shut in this room. They are all sleeping round us. They might as well be dead. And we have to speak in low voices because they are dead. But in an hour we could be out on the hills. And we could sing if we liked and

no one would hear. And the morning would be our first morning, and all day——"

Her hand had travelled up my arm and gripped it. I looked into her face which the moon touched and saw there, not my own faith, but an incredulous, frightened look that froze my being.

"What are you saying, Nigel? What do you mean?"

Though my own certainty was gone and I knew from her trembling that I had been mistaken, I fell into a futility of persuasion. Did she not understand how easy it was to escape? Nothing was needed but courage to go our own way. I tried to force upon her the joy of spiritual defiance which had been a flame within me, and spoke recklessly of a life that took no account of worldly fears.

But she would say only:

"Are you asking that I should go away with you—now, to-night?"

I cried that there was no other way. If we did not go together that night we should never go. I fell upon my knees at her feet and begged her not to be blind to what I could see so clearly—that, though all experience and caution were against it, flight now was the only way for us. To stay was to sin against ourselves.

"Oh, what have I done?" she whispered. "I didn't mean that, Nigel. I didn't ever mean that."

"This is our chance," I replied in a last struggle, feeling that every instant was holy

and precious and demanded of us. "If we're not afraid now, we shall never be afraid again. Come away with me now, Clare. Come now."

"It's impossible," she said. "Don't you see how impossible it is?" And she added slowly, as if speaking to herself, with a wondering and tender mockery that pierced me: "Are you a child still, my Nigel, with your wisdom beyond all hope?"

I could say no more. The moment and my belief in it were passed. I was tired beyond thought of battle.

Suddenly she knelt beside me and drew my head upon her breast, and began to comfort me as if I had been a child. A blissful illusion of peace possessed me. I neither spoke nor resisted; I was content to feel her arms about me and the warmth and movement of her flesh beneath my cheek. But, when I looked up, I saw in her eyes the possessive tenderness of a woman for an unhappy child, and upon her lips a smile which, though gentle, gave a curious faint hint of amusement and pride. Seeing this, I became in an instant an ashamed boy. I had made a fool of myself. Even then for a little while I did not stir, but remained within her comfort, gazing through her hair at the pale window, daring not yet to go out alone, and thinking, as the edge of a new storm drifted across the sky, of the frosted globe in the dining-room at home.

III

FAREWELL TO DRUFFORD

"Well," said my mother, when she had won from Richard and Ethel all the information they would give her about Lisson and our way of life there, "and how did Nigel get on?"

I do not mean to imply that they had deliberately kept anything from her. They had answered all her questions and added little descriptions and comments which they thought would please her; but ours was never an intimately communicative family. We would tell what we had seen and heard, and so much of our thoughts as the listener, if he had been present, might have easily shared; but it was not our custom—it would, indeed, have been an emotional breach of a long-respected habit—to give to anyone insight into our hearts. Richard would say of Clare that she was "as pretty as ever"; that Ned Fullaton was "badly hit"; and that, as for their marriage, no doubt they'd settle down to it comfortably enough. He went so far as to say that he liked her better than he had expected; but, when my mother asked why, he answered: "Oh, I don't know, Mamma. There are some people, don't you think, who

improve on acquaintance." And she was satisfied with that reply, for it was of the non-committal kind that was common coin at home. It made no challenge, infringed no reticence, stirred no feeling, summoned no picture to the imagination, but helped to keep conversation jogging in a friendly, meaningless way until it was time for bed.

"Did you enjoy yourself, my dear?" she asked me.

"Oh yes, very much."

"That's a good thing." She smoothed out her sewing and gave it a tug across her knee. "Would you mind drawing the lamp a little closer, Ethel, dear?"

"As a matter of fact," said Ethel, "Nigel got on awfully well. Mr. Fullaton—old Mr. Fullaton, I mean—took to him; didn't he, Nigel? He said he'd be a great artist some day."

"That's all right," my father put in, looking up from the portable mahogany desk which he had spread out on the dining-room table, "but did he tell you where the great artist's bread and butter was coming from?"

It was said not unkindly and certainly without cynicism, for my father was not a worshipper of money; the words were no more than his habitual check to enthusiasm. "I am one of those," he added, "who like to see each step ahead and to take each step as it comes."

"Yes, that is quite right, of course," said my mother, "but it would be nice if Nigel were an

artist *as well* as other things. It is a great pity that Ethel dropped her music—and you, Richard, too —you played quite prettily when you were a little boy."

"There I agree." My father laid down his pen and took off his spectacles. "As it turns out all that teaching was expense thrown away. I often think: 'What wouldn't I give to be able to sit down at a piano and play a tune.' When I was a young man living in rooms alone, I'd have given my head for it of an evening if I didn't happen to have brought work back from the office."

My mother sighed, perhaps at the thought of those far-off days, perhaps because Richard and Ethel had so wasted their opportunities. "Of course," she said, "drawing and so on isn't useful in the same way. It doesn't give the same pleasure to others. But if Nigel's talent lies in that direction, it would be a pity to discourage it."

She looked at my father with solicitude on my behalf, but he, absorbed again in the letter he was writing, said only: "Of course, my dear, that would never do," and so dismissed the subject.

To fight against my parents in this matter was, I knew, to beat the air. They were invariably kind; in the undemonstrative way of our family, they were affectionate. They ardently desired my prosperity and happiness, and would have made —aye, and did make—great sacrifices for their children's sake. Never were parents less con-

sciously selfish; this was the source of their unchallengeable strength. If they had bullied me or had mocked at art, it would have been relatively easy to defy them. Instead, they treated art—the art of Burlington House and the public galleries—with the respect that courteous travellers show towards the established religions of foreign countries, and their minds did not admit, as a serious prospect, that a son of theirs should devote his life to the worship of these outlandish gods. They were pleased that I should "keep up my drawing" as they were sorry that Ethel had failed to keep up her music. Against them, I felt, there were no weapons.

My father's pen scratched on through a long silence. Richard turned a page of his book.

"This is a good tale!" he exclaimed. "Have you read it, Mamma?"

"No, my dear."

"You ought to."

"I don't care much for novels, Richard, I am afraid. So many touch on subjects that are far better left alone. They are a great cause of discontent, I think, with life as ordinary people have to live it."

So our evenings were always passed at home. There were long silences and little spurts of talk which had no purpose but to prevent the silences from becoming "unsociable." Except on the occasions—and even they were now becoming infrequent—when Ethel and my father crossed

swords, there was no warmth or life in our relations with one another. If inadvertently any one trod upon ground that proved to be personal, and therefore dangerous, a dexterous turning of the conversation was an accepted way of retreat. I do not doubt that when Ethel now spoke of my portrait of Clare she had no other intention than to drag forward the slow chatter of the evening.

"Did you bring the drawings home?" she asked.

"I have them somewhere."

"I'm sure Mamma would like to see them."

"Certainly I should," my mother said listlessly. "Run and fetch them down, Nigel. Your father would be interested too, I know."

"I'd rather not," I said, and instantly I felt Richard's eyes upon me.

"Why—'rather not'?" my father asked.

"They're not finished. They weren't very successful, you see. I'd much rather not, if you don't mind."

"Nonsense, my boy. Your mother and I always like to see what you have been doing. We're not so particular as all that."

"I know, but you see—just for my own satisfaction—I like my drawings to be done before I show them to people."

My father laughed. "You're becoming too modest, Nigel. We are not outside people—critical and so on. You run up and get them now."

"What about to-morrow?" Richard said, coming to my rescue as best he could. "It will be easier to see them by daylight."

But resistance was in vain as all resistance to my parents was in vain, not because they were tyrannically insistent, but because they assumed that their way was the only reasonable one. I went to my room, found the book in which the drawings were contained, and laid it closed on the table beside my mother's lamp. No one was in any hurry to open it. My father continued his letter, my mother her sewing, Richard his novel. Ethel, perceiving that she had involved me in a contest of which she did not understand the origin, instinctively ranged herself on my side against our parents. She would now have bitten out her tongue rather than suggest that the drawings should be inspected.

But inspected they were. My mother reached for the book and opened it without genuine interest. Knowing that all my secret was exposed there to those that had eyes to see it, I consoled myself with the thought that, unless I betrayed the truth in some rashness of speech, my mother would skim through the pages and discover nothing. But, as I watched her, certain signs—an eager forward movement of her head, a tightening of her fingers, a hasty, embarrassed raising of her eyes to mine—told me that she was less blind than I had supposed.

"I think Miss Sibright has rather a selfish

mouth," she said at last. "Was that your impression, Richard?"

Richard laid his book upon his knees almost with impatience. His absorption in it was being over-acted.

"Selfish?" he answered. "No, I shouldn't say that. She's almost quixotically generous sometimes."

My mother nodded and turned to another page. "Well, you know her and I do not. . . . Perhaps self-centred is the right word. She reminds me somehow of Miss Cathcart who, I am sure, is always seeing herself as the heroine of the romances she reads. Of course, Miss Cathcart was never good looking, and she is getting on in years. That makes a difference, but——"

"Oh, Mamma," Ethel exclaimed, "what a comparison! Why, Miss Cathcart is quite ridiculous; everyone says so."

"Still——" said my mother, stiffly unconvinced; and she added: "What *queer* drawings they are, Nigel! They remind me—— There, I don't know what they remind me of unless it's a stained-glass window."

"Perhaps it's the old masters," Ethel put in, not without a sneer. "That was what Mr. Fullaton said."

I blundered into speech as, I suppose, was inevitable. "You see," I said, dropping on my knees by my mother's side in a hopeless attempt to make her understand my work as I understood it, "you see, she isn't always the same—not the

same from hour to hour, I mean, and not the same, even at a given moment, to different people. She changed even while she was at Lisson."

"Changed?" said my mother. "Nigel, dear, people don't change as fast as that."

"Not physically," I answered. "I know that. And that isn't what I meant. When you said she was self-centred, perhaps in a way you were right, Mamma. But when you said the drawings reminded you of a stained-glass window, didn't you mean there was something holy in her face? And there you were right also. There is holiness in her, something sacred and rare. But she is only beginning to discover it. It's like daybreak in her face—slow and doubtful sometimes, and sometimes, if you're watching, radiant. Then it is shadowed over again and you think it's lost. And then, when you look up, her eyes are shining with it. . . . That's what I mean by 'changing'—and that's why I couldn't finish. Do you see now, Mamma?"

With what intense curiosity she looked at me then! She was thinking: "How short a time it is since he was in his cradle, and now—now this has begun!" I knew that she had not been listening to my explanation—only to the tone of my words, which had told her all she needed to know.

"Aren't you speaking a little extravagantly, Nigel?" she said, and my father observed with a chuckle: "Bless my soul, we shall begin to think you've lost your head about the young lady if you

talk like that, my boy. And what would Ned Fullaton say to that, eh, Richard?"

Richard tried to speak, but for once was unable to find an easy phrase on which to ride away. A deep awkward silence fell upon us all. Lonely in a passion that none could share with me, I remembered, with an agony of secrecy that filled my throat with thick stabbing pains, how my head had lain upon Clare's breast. Looking at the steel tongs propped on the dogs, I was seeing the night sky through her hair, when my mother, after a glance at my face, gently closed the book.

"There," she said. "Don't let's worry about it any more. . . . Are you going to see Mr. Doggin to-morrow? He'll be pleased, surely?"

I took the book from her and touched her forehead with my lips.

"Going to bed so soon?" my father said when I approached him. "Well, good night my boy. Happy dreams. I should like to be off to bed too, but I have several letters to write."

I thought, perhaps I hoped, that Richard would follow me upstairs, and I left my bedroom door open that I might listen for his footstep. But he was wise and did not come. After a little while I closed the door. I remembered how I had stood at my window in the Trobeys' house and feared this moment of return to my bedroom at home. On the floor was my half-emptied luggage with its straps hanging loose just as I had imagined it. My eyes travelled to the ornaments that stood on

my dressing-table, and the few books which had always been in a little shelf screwed to the wall. Taking down *Quentin Durward*, I found on its fly-leaf in my own round hand: "Nigel, from his Father, Christmas 1868," and for the first time the writing seemed not to be my own, but that of some child of a remote childhood to which, even in imagination, there could now be no return. There was no escape, forward or backward, from a past so near that it seemed to be within reach. Was Clare sitting in the darkness of her own room? Was she looking out on the row of poplars that I had seen? It was still too early. She was in the drawing-room playing whist; she was in the low chair by the fireplace where I had so often watched her; she was standing near the piano with a cup of tea raised to her lips. Or was she, perhaps, leaning over the banisters and kissing her hand to old Fullaton in the hall below? If she had come away with me, all would have been changed. If she had come away, where should we have been now? I saw myself at her side in a fantastic carriage; I heard the harness creak and felt the dragging of the horses' speed; I thrust my hand through the window of the carriage and felt the air rush by.

But my nails were vibrating on the ribbed binding of *Quentin Durward*. I had returned to Drufford and must pretend day after day that I was still the boy I had been when I went away. A little while I wandered round my room; then

came again to a halt. While my legs ached with standing and my mind reeled in circles of questioning and self-reproach, I remained fixed by my candle, staring at its flame and pressing inward the soft wax at its rim.

"Hullo," said my father, pushing his head into the room. "Not in bed yet!"

"No, I'm just going."

"That's right. Save the light. . . . Why, you haven't begun to undress and you went off half an hour ago."

"I'm going to bed now."

"That's right. That's a good boy."

His look was grave, but, if he had an impulse to make further inquiry, he checked it.

"Well," he said, "off with you now. Nothing like a good night's rest."

I took off my clothes, climbed into bed and put out the light. I lay still with an edge of blanket beneath my teeth. I had not moved when, in the background of a waking dream, the china handle of my door was slowly turned.

"You awake, Nigel?"

Quiet footsteps advanced. The springs of my mattress creaked under a new weight.

"Look here, Nigel," said Richard's voice. "Don't think about her too much."

"Don't think about her?"

"I doubt if she's worth it."

"Her" and "she"—there was a delicious comfort in hearing those words on the lips of another.

They gave her life; they brought her out of the numbness of exhausted thought. To speak of her, to hear her spoken of—this was a breach in the silence that had swallowed her up. What Richard said mattered little.

"Don't you let these people make a fool of you," he was saying. "You have your own work to do."

"Painting?"

"Oh, well . . . if you like." It was not painting that had been in his mind.

"Except Clare, there's nothing I want but painting. And, now I've lost her, even that——"

"Oh come," he interrupted, "it's never so bad as you think."

He remained a minute in silence; then, with a "good night, old man," went stealthily away.

By now, I thought, she is certainly in bed. Through the dark I heard her breathing. That she could sleep was a final exclusion. "Why am I shut out like this? Why am I shut out?" She was lying on her left side, a bare forearm raised before her face. "Soon she will stir," I thought, "and her eyes will open. Soon the fingers will loosen and unfold."

Far away an engine whistled as it entered a tunnel. I could imagine nothing now but a slow procession of goods wagons jolting through the darkness, and hear only the acorn of my blind-cord gently tapping against the pane.

It seems now to me, an old man, not surprising that I look back upon my father's home at Drufford with deep affection and a sense of irreparable loss. I loved my father and mother, not because they were ever spiritual companions of mine, but because their love for a younger son, whom it must have been hard for them to love, was the foundation of my life—a foundation which never shook and which, I knew, nothing could ever shake. Their love was not a flame, but it was a rock. There was, perhaps, more loyalty than understanding in it, but the loyalty was absolute. Since death ended it, though there have been in my life hopes and exaltations which my parents could not have shared, there has been nothing certain in any human relationship.

The home they made was a part of themselves —sometimes a prison to me, sometimes a desert, but unique in this—that it was impregnable to the world. Therefore, though there was that within me which made escape from it necessary, I hated nothing and I despise nothing that it contained. It was the place to which I brought my suffering. I brought it thither with dread, but there was no other place that would have received it with equal simplicity. My parents did not give serious credit to my passion. When they recognized it at all, they thought it extravagant and misguided—a boy's foolishness; and they attempted, with fumbling, self-confident hands, to apply a remedy that was useless and, in effect, cruel. But as a mother

does not hate a child for the distorting ugliness of its tears, so they did not hate me for the ugliness of my grief, or contemn me for the folly of it. Others would have mocked me or turned away from me in disgust. Friends are embarrassed by the tumult of another's emotion and desire to escape from it; their attitude towards the sufferer is changed. But my parents did not change. In their hearts they blamed my weakness, but their loyalty to me, their son, was unswerving. To persist in the steady routine of life, to say nothing and do nothing exceptional, to show to me that, though all else crumbled, they and their home stood—this was the method of their love for me. It was a part of what they believed to be the method of a wise and just God.

Like God's, it was not a soft method. If they had been what is called "sympathetic," they would have enabled me to dramatize my misery and so, by setting myself upon a tragic stage, to escape solitude. I might have written letters to Clare and flattered myself with wilful self-torture. But I did not write to her, for it was not in my mind that I should see her again. I made no childish vows to her memory nor any frantic renunciations. There was nothing to vow or to renounce. The present was without movement and the future without expectation. Yet a visible life continued, an automatic existence of words and actions, with which, though I appeared in it, I had no connexion in motive.

Life had never been so visible. I saw the world —I mean the physical appearances of it—as if I had been given new eyes. At the bottom of our garden, opposite the stile which opened a meadow-path to Mr. Doggin's house, was a laurel-bush upon which a leaf had wasted to a skeleton. That intricate outline became so impressed on my mind that I was able to draw it without the omission of a filament. The low hum of insects, which commonly the ear receives as part of the general music of summer, became for me an articulate orchestra in which each instrument was distinguished. Never had there been such urgent vigour in nature, nor had material things ever possessed so stabbing a reality. Persons also were thrown into relief. I observed, and could not help observing, the texture of their skin, the patterned interlacing of the hairs of their head, their muscular movement, the stretching or slackening of their clothes' fabric. They were alive as they had never been; but I did not feel myself to have a share in their lives. My mind was sensitive to the edge of madness, but my spirit was numb.

The drawings I did at that time were exceptionally rapid and sure, and I took a secret pleasure —not, I think, recognized as pleasure at all—in concealing from my master the work I had done at Lisson. Once, when he asked of it, I lied, saying that I had done nothing while I was away; but the lie could not be maintained.

"There were some sketches for a portrait," I admitted at last.

"Then why did you say there was nothing?"

"There's nothing finished. That's true."

I remember how he looked at me then as if I had only deepened my lie. His full white eyebrows were dragged down over the pits of his eyes.

"What is it you are concealing from me?" he exclaimed. "More than unfinished drawings, I'll be bound. These weeks since your return you have been concealing something. The inside of you is frozen. Your work——"

"Very well," I interrupted. "You shall see what I did."

Next day the Clare drawings were laid out before him.

"And then you come back," he said slowly after long consideration of them, "and draw as you have been drawing!" He touched a pile of my recent work; then turned to Clare again. "Since you came back, you have been drawing with an accomplishment and ease that aren't yours. Did you know that? A kind of fluent perfection—not yours as I know you. A brilliant advance of talent——" He broke off and, seizing my shoulder with one hand, tapped with the butt of a pencil the drawings that had been fought over at Lisson. "But this," he said, "is the failure of genius. Did you know that?"

"I think I knew," I answered.

His anger left him and he smiled at me.

"Don't draw for a little while," he said in a tone that made me love him. "Wait. . . . Why didn't you tell me the truth, boy? Haven't I deserved it?"

"I will tell you," I cried. "I——"

"No." The grip on my shoulder tightened. "Wait. You can't tell me in words. You'll tell me in your work when the time comes."

The time was long in coming. When my father announced that I was to begin my preparation for Oxford, I did not resist; indeed, I went almost with pleasure, and certainly with relief, to Mr. Soldith, the curate, who had undertaken my instruction. On four mornings of each week he and I sat down together at a small green-baize table with books of Greek or Latin between us. I remember little of him but that he surprised me by considering Greek plays as tasks of so many counted lines. His breath smelt of tobacco, and the finger with which he turned the pages of the lexicon was grey with pipe-ash, but he was an eager, conscientious man, who, though he cared not a jot for the impression that the classical authors made upon me, was genuinely anxious that I should please my father by success before the examiners.

"Good progress this morning," he would say. "Twenty lines of stichomythia, the end of that chorus—a stiff one, and a fair piece of middlings."

Through autumn and winter I worked hard. The news of Clare's marriage at the end of August had failed to stir me. It was news of the dead.

They packed her present while I watched; I had no care for it. As the weeks passed, personal emotion seemed to dry up within me. My father was pleased to see the remedy of work, which he had chosen, apparently succeed so well. Mr. Soldith's good reports made him doubly proud. He did not guess that the work I did was a kind of automatism—an activity that was no essential activity of mine. I was continuously living two lives—an outward life, not unhappy, in which I was proud of having overcome scholarly difficulties and of being able to draw, when I took pencil in hand, with such unfailing dexterity, a life, in short, wherein I drifted with the stream of my talents, caring not at all whither the drift might lead; and an inward life of increasing solitude in which what had once been the vitality of my soul was barren and imprisoned.

The months passed without relief or change. The leaves fell and were swept into hissing piles on the garden paths; they became sodden and were carried away. The skies darkened and snow fringed the window-panes. We breakfasted by lamplight and in the evenings hugged the fire. In February Miss Cathcart died, and we shivered at her grave, wearing black kid gloves. When the weather was coldest, the curate fell ill, but not so ill that our work could not be continued to the accompaniment of a kettle that vomited steam into the room. Afterwards he wore mittens and looked often to the window, hungry for sunshine.

I was surprised, for in me there was no longing for the year's renewal.

But one day of early spring, when the contrast between Nature's increasing life and the death within myself had become unendurable, I went out alone and climbed a hill. It was approached by a long grassy slope known to me since my childhood, and, as I mounted it, the quiet, steady effort calmed me. The living face of Nature, which hitherto had seemed to menace me, looked kindly into my isolated and frozen heart. More than ever was I solitary, but my solitude took on a glory which it had never before possessed. When I reached the summit, I lay down upon the springing turf and hid my face amid the grass and thyme. I felt earth's heat below and the heat of the sun above me. My eyes, pressed close to the brilliant forest of the grasses, seemed to penetrate the depths of the earth, and my outspread arms to feel its mass clasped in their embrace. I became aware, with an extraordinary delight, of my physical smallness, but was not frightened, or forced into insignificance by this experience, as by the presence of great machinery or of human beings in mass. I was at once exalted and comforted. I felt myself absorbed in the open vastness of the universe about me. The agonies of particular memory and disappointment, the hurts to pride, all the wounds of human intercourse that had tormented me were reduced to the proportion of the body which lay as a speck

upon the curve of earth; my spirit sprang up, marched with the giants, took wings among the gods. The courage to create awoke in me; joy, a tide from earth and heaven, found me and swept me forward; a sweetness, like the sweetness of early morning at sea, hung on the breeze that lifted my hair and flowed in on my parted lips. I was identified with that day of sap and resurrection, and lay still with an emotion pouring from me which had in it the passion, but not the supplication, of prayer.

My solitude had been the solitude of death; now there was no beauty and no life save within its terrors. To this secret life, as if I had discovered a cloister of the creative spirit, I dedicated myself, and stayed unmoving in bliss. At last the forest of the grasses grew dim and the breeze struck coldly upon me, though beneath my hands earth was yet warm. Rising then, I walked home, exhausted but at peace.

On my way I decided that I would not go to Oxford as my father intended. It was a firm, tranquil decision which, far from suggesting conflict to me, lifted a weight from my mind.

It was Saturday, and my father was at home. The whole family, and Mr. Doggin with them, were gathered together in the morning-room. So excited was I by the vigour of my own resolve that I did not at once notice the strangeness of this

group's appearance or perceive any significance in it. Daylight continued in the garden and threw a bleak pallor over them all; yet the lamp, on a small table of polished walnut, had been kindled. It was my discovery that they had lighted the lamp without drawing the curtains—an unprecedented irregularity in our household—which first struck me to surprise. Then I became aware that their silence was a silence of agitation. They were not quietly at ease, but tongue-tied. My mother looked up nervously, expecting my father to speak; he opened his lips and abruptly closed them again. Richard and Ethel remained in purposeful obscurity. Mr. Doggin, playing with a reel of cotton that stood on the mantelpiece, would not meet my eyes. I had been about to tell him that now—now at last!—I could work again; but I was chilled, and hesitated, not knowing what to expect. Suddenly my father began.

"Nigel, just come over here and sit down."

"Perhaps you would draw the curtains first, Nigel, dear," my mother put in. "I am never comfortable in a room between lights."

No word interrupted the soft rattle of mahogany curtain-rings.

"Now," my father said when I had taken the chair that he indicated, "have you been working with Mr. Soldith to-day?"

"This morning."

"And this afternoon?"

"I've been out for a walk."

"Alone?"

"Yes." I saw their eyes shift at this confession of strange behaviour. Just like him! they were thinking. "On Flock Hill," I added, as if that were an explanation.

"Rather gloomy—walking alone? I often wonder what you think about." And before I had had time to answer, he added, with swiftness and purpose: "Not Latin and Greek, I'll be bound."

"No. Not Latin and Greek. I was thinking—in fact, I made up my mind——"

I paused, not in fear before the ring of faces, for my mind was indeed made up, but because I wished, if I could, to make them understand why my going to Oxford had now become impossible. While I hesitated, my father went firmly on.

"And you weren't thinking of Oxford either?"

"Not on the hill, not until afterwards when——"

"Do you never look forward to going there?" my father asked in a tone of disappointment, continuing the argument of his own thought and not hearing my interruption. It was as if a young animal, whose diet he had been carefully studying, had refused ungratefully to eat from his hand. "Most young men of your age would be counting the days, you know."

Richard and Ethel shifted on their chairs. They longed to bring him to the point, but dared not. Looking at them and waiting, I felt a stranger in their company, and the more a stranger because

our surroundings were heavy with a familiarity, an authority almost, which I, but not they, had outgrown.

"Well," my father said, "you know my opinion for what it is worth. I have always thought that you should go to Oxford and enter a regular profession of your own choice—even if you don't want to follow in my footsteps. You say you want to be an artist——"

"Yes, I'm more sure than—than—— This afternoon I saw it all so clearly. While I was on Flock Hill——"

"Not so fast, my boy, not so fast. Just hear what I have to say. Now, this is the point, Nigel: in most professions, if you have ability, good health, good education, and are a hard worker, you can be sure of getting on up to a certain point. But for an artist it's just a toss up whether he strikes oil. What's fashionable one day is unfashionable the next. You may have ability and work hard all your life and get next to nothing in return. Have you considered that?"

I nodded my head and drew breath. "I have honestly thought about it," I answered, trying to speak calmly. "This isn't just an impulse with me. Ever since I was a small boy there's only been one thing."

"Yes," said my mother, inspecting this fresh evidence with surprise. "That is true, we must admit. Nigel has never wanted what other boys want—to be an engine-driver or a fireman or a

soldier. Always this drawing, drawing, drawing, from the very first."

My father spared a smile for these maternal recollections. "So you want to take the risk?"

"Yes."

"It is your responsibility. You are old enough to decide."

"Yes," I answered again, feeling that there was something sacred and beautiful in the word. I had made my vow. It was strange that I had been invited to make it.

"Very well," my father replied. "Now there's the question of *my* responsibility. Hitherto your mother and I have been against your taking such a risk. I've thought to myself: the thing to do is to give him a solid start in life; if he *is* an artist, that will appear in the end. Great things have been done in spare time by men who have the grit. And if he's not an artist—well——"

"You see," Ethel exclaimed, unable to repress her irritation. "Papa never would believe that you were any good, Nigel—any real good, I mean. I told him ages ago what Mr. Fullaton said about you, but he wouldn't listen to me."

"I listened, Ethel," he said, "but you are sometimes given to making extravagant statements, or perhaps we should have taken you more seriously than we did."

"You never take me seriously, Papa. You never take any of us seriously. Anyhow, there's proof

now whether this was an extravagant statement or not."

"Yes, Ethel dear," my mother said in a tone, habitual in her, of mingled severity and mildness, "but you must allow Papa to approach this matter in his own way."

I was bewildered. What was "this matter" which had so profoundly disturbed my family? Why did Ethel now seem to favour my becoming an artist? And my father, almost without protest, had allowed her to speak as she had spoken. Every tradition of the household was being overthrown.

"However that may be," my father went on—and that was all the notice he took of Ethel—"something important has happened which means a change of plan."

The truth was plain now. Suddenly I understood that my father was about to make a recantation, setting me free of Oxford, and that my mother, though she did not herself approve his inconsistency, was loyally defending it.

"You owe much to your brother, Nigel. It all arose in a letter to Richard from his friend Ned Fullaton. Richard brought it to me. . . . You had better tell that part yourself, Richard."

"Oh," said Richard, so casually that I knew he had dared a considerable battle for my sake, "it was only that Ned said his father was often speaking of you, Nigel—saying how good the work was that he had seen, and how you had

promised to work some day in his studio at Windrush, and how much he wished that you were free to do so."

" 'Instead of wasting your time at Oxford,' " my father painfully added. "Of course I don't know whether those were the father's words or the son's, but obviously they arose from Henry Fullaton's opinion. At first I was inclined to disregard it, but Richard—" and here my father smiled his repentance for what had been, perhaps, an angry scene—"Richard held on like a bull-dog. Persuaded me to write to Mr. Fullaton."

I heard him tell the history of that correspondence, of their meetings in London, of their long discussion of ways and means.

"Well," he concluded, "I was impressed by the way Mr. Fullaton spoke. He said that in his considered opinion it was my duty to let you have your own way in this. After all, as I said to your mother, art is outside our province; we cannot pretend to judge of it. We must rely on expert advice."

"It's like going to a doctor, really," said my mother, reassuring herself.

"Exactly. And Mr. Fullaton is a Royal Academician and stands, therefore, at the top of his profession. What's more, he talks like a sensible man of the world."

What a battle my parents had had to convince themselves! I love them now for their pains.

"So there you are, my boy," my father said with a sigh. "The die is cast. It is folly to take advice unless, if it appears to be sound, one is prepared to follow it. Of course," he added with an afterthought of politeness, "I consulted Mr. Doggin here as well. He agrees that you are qualified to follow an artistic career. Isn't that so, Mr. Doggin?"

My old master replied: "Wouldn't it be better to tell Nigel everything before I say my say?"

"What more is there to tell? He's free to take his own course."

"You have made plans for him, Mr. Frew. I mean, plans for the immediate future."

"Oh yes, that goes without saying," said my father as if, now that he had taken the plunge, what followed was of but slight importance. "You are to go to Windrush and live there and work in Mr. Fullaton's studio."

At first I made no answer. I was stunned by so swift a change in my fortunes. Then, slowly, without fully understanding my father's plan, I felt the gladness that had been in me invaded by fear. Windrush! I had been caught in a trap.

"No," I cried passionately, jumping from my seat. "No. I don't want to go to Windrush." I faced Mr. Doggin. "I want to stay and work here with you. I can work now. This afternoon, on Flock Hill, it all came back to me. Even if this hadn't happened my mind was made up. I should never have gone to Oxford."

"Steady, Nigel," my father said. "If my plan for you—— But there's no need to go into all that now."

"Yes, believe me, Sir, there is need. I want Mr. Doggin, at any rate, to know that this—this isn't just following a path because it has been made easy. I wish it hadn't been made easy. I wish I'd had to fight for it."

"Come," my father answered kindly, "you may find it hard enough yet. You have a long way to go."

My parents' sudden yielding had taken its joy from revolt. The weapons with which I had been miraculously armed on Flock Hill seemed useless now. It was a sense of proud and exalted solitude, a discovery of myself alone, which had cleansed me. Now I was servant to another's plan, and, while Windrush grew in my imagination, I felt myself drawn back into that barren agony from which on Flock Hill I had broken free. The thought of Clare returned like the stab of a sword-point. I wondered, with a great turbulence of mind, how the fever of her had been cooled that afternoon by contemplative winds. The man in me was possessed by an unconquerable yearning; the artist by an unspeakable fear. I wanted to run towards her, yet to be shut away from her for ever; to worship, yet to be free. Turning to my master—

"I want to stay here," I repeated, "and work with you until you send me away."

"Now, Nigel," my mother said, "do not be

wilful and contrary. This has all been most carefully considered, and your father, I am sure, has decided for the best."

Could she also have forgotten Clare? I did not even then fully understand the logical working of my parents' minds. They had, I suppose, decided, soon after my return from Lisson, that "the boy fancied himself to have an attachment to this Miss Sibright." Latin and Greek—something to occupy my mind—had been their remedy for it. They had never doubted its success. The trouble, moreover, had been ended in their minds by Miss Sibright's marriage. Her wedding had been to them, like all weddings, as final as the putting of a new shilling into the offertory plate; no one would seek to take back what had thus been dedicated. A son of theirs would not continue to love a married woman.

But their son now, looking into their faces, wondered how they had forgotten her presence at Windrush.

"Don't you want to go to Windrush?" said Ethel in astonishment. Only Richard and Mr. Doggin were silent.

"I want to work," I cried. "Nothing but work. No thought but work. Don't you see?—everything else shut out."

Surely they would remember now!

"But where can you work better than at Windrush?" Ethel persisted.

"Besides," said my father, who still thought

of me as a child and intended no more than to joke with a child, "you will have a charming hostess, my boy. Have you forgotten her so soon?"

Everyone in the room became suddenly hateful. All the barriers of reticence went down. I moved my lips to cry, as one cries against menace in a dream, that because of her I would not and dared not go. I feared that in my love for her I should lose my liberty, and, in what words I know not, should have cried that fear aloud. My face must have given my master warning, for he took me by the shoulder and insisted quietly that it was he who wished me to go. "Henry Fullaton," he said, "is a second-rate artist, but he is a profound historian of painting and a fine craftsman. He can teach you as much of the use of paint as anyone in England. I can teach you little of that. I am a draughtsman. I understand you, perhaps; but you have outgrown me. I want you to go."

"But you are not understanding me now," I answered. "You don't understand why at Windrush——"

"Yes," he said, "I do, and all the more I say you must go. You have a portrait to finish. Have you forgotten that?"

"Forgotten it!"

"Then go," he repeated. "Fear nothing. Only the little men turn aside from walking with devils and angels. You will find God himself in no other company."

"Have I then strength enough," I thought, "to walk with devils and angels?" and, my mind returning to Flock Hill, I understood anew the summons I had received there. A high excitement swept over me, an agitation of sight, a stinging of the flesh. My family were still discussing the date and manner of my going to Windrush; their faces were turned to me—already, it seemed, out of a remote past; there was, in their attitudes, the rigid familiarity of some picture that had hung on the wall since childhood. But I was a child no more. Even my old master was left behind by this assurance of life's advance. It was as if I had leapt from a parapet and had found wings.

Of the days that intervened between my father's announcement and my going to Windrush I can recall little but their expectant mood. Sometimes it was gladness that possessed me; sometimes a wild trembling of spirit at the prospect of re-encounter with Clara. I remember standing one night beside my dressing-table and picking at a little bead pen-wiper that lay there—a maternal decoration, for it was never used to wipe a pen. It became a symbol, while I held it in my hand, of the secure orderly domesticity from which I was casting loose, and so, by a transference of thought, its pattern became associated with the pattern of the new life of which I had been dreaming. One stares thus, at a crisis of existence,

at some inanimate thing itself meaningless, until dreams and memories become entangled with the image of it. To this day, if in some antiquary's shop or in a stiff drawing-room of wax-fruit and pampas-grass I come upon a beaded futility that my mother's needle might have contrived, I am flooded with joy and fear; I see, as I saw that evening, a spiral pattern of blue, green, and red; I say farewell in my heart to *Quentin Durward*, to a bathroom with a wall-paper of yellowed marble, to my father's portable desk, to vast engravings in maple-wood, to all the dear ugliness that was home as no other home could ever be again; and I look forward, as my boy's eyes looked then, into an untasted world, and descry with anguish and longing a girl's face which seemed beautiful then as no other beauty had ever been. I can smile now; but that evening, when I stared at the little disc of beads and threw it down at last, I did not smile, seeing my childhood fade and manhood unknown before me.

My father stayed away from the office on the day of farewell. All my family came to Paddington to see the youngest of us start on his adventure —my mother with a parcel under her mantle, Richard magnificently worldly with a long cane, a silk hat, and a short coat fastened by its top button, and Ethel, in a small round hat with a curled feather, carrying a very small scarlet parasol. We arrived on the platform too early.

"You have your money safe?" said my father.

"Yes, quite safe."

"That's to keep account of. Keep the book neatly and I'll let you have more when you need it. And, look here"—a sovereign purse came out of his waistcoat pocket—"you needn't keep any account of this. Not too big to take a tip, I suppose? . . . There, be careful of it. It takes a lot of earning."

My mother handed her parcel through the window after the door was shut.

"Brushes," she said. "Some rather special ones, with my blessing, my dear. Mr. Doggin chose them for me, so they'll be all right, won't they?"

Richard and Ethel had subscribed together to buy a leather case for pencils, stamped N.F. "Though I think you're a lucky little pig," said Ethel, "and I don't see why we should all give you things because you're going away to have the best time of your life."

A bell had rung. The guard was blowing his whistle.

"There, God bless you, my boy, be good and work hard. . . . There, there, Mother, you'll see him come back an R.A."

IV

WINDRUSH

A LONG journey to the West and a drive over rolling country brought me to Windrush in an early twilight. A few windows glowed through the elms; a stiff breeze from the valley straightened the horses' manes. Backed by the gleam of an open doorway, Mr. Fullaton came down the steps to welcome me. He was already dressed for dinner; his grey hair had fallen loose and a great cloak flowed gustily about him. Before I had moved, his hand was thrust over the carriage side and grasped mine.

"This is good," he exclaimed. "Come in. Come in," and I felt, with a thrill of gratitude, that he was as excited as I.

Through the hall and upstairs he came, never releasing his grip on my arm, never ceasing to talk and question me.

"I should like to take you off to my studio first of all. That's to be the first room of the house for us, eh? But it's too late and getting dark. You must dress, young man, and sharp's the word. There's a *festa* to-night."

"A *festa*?"

"A crowd to dinner. All the big-wigs. Windrush, I can tell you, is a different place since Ned brought Clare home. We've grown young again. The whole county's rejuvenated—or thinks it is. She acts like an elixir—though, by Jove, I never thought she would. Too independent and sensitive—that was my idea. But she's taken to Windrush like a duck to water. Just shows; there's no judging a girl until she's been married."

I might have been prepared by this for what was to follow, but I understood Mr. Fullaton's words to mean no more than that he and his friends had grown to like Clare and were infected by her vitality; that she was, in any genuine sense, at home among them, I did not believe possible. The constant image of her in my own mind was of one who belonged no more to the Fullatons than to the Trobeys. I did not believe even, as my brother did, that she was drawn to Ned by powerful desire. She had married him because the conditions of her life made a marriage of this kind necessary; that formula had seemed enough. Being his wife, she would play her part, but only as a bird that sings in its cage. She would continue to be dominated by aspirations which Ned could not share, and by spiritual hungers which he could not satisfy. Had I not perceived with my own eyes this quality in her? Had I not been baffled in portraiture by my perception of it? Had I not loved her for its sake and for the gap it created between herself and the world of comfortable

materialism from which I also was divided? That she should be absorbed by her surroundings at Windrush was not within the range of my surmise. Others might believe it of her and might speak, as they did at Lisson, of her evident detachments as "eccentricities," but she and I would know each other for what we were: strangers in a strange land, who conformed—she with brilliant ease, I with difficulty—to its customs. It was, perhaps, because this was my view of her that I had never been jealous of Ned. That I had lost her, that we had failed to seek adventure in each other's company, had been agony to me; but she had not seemed the more lost because she was married. Our parting had been a death that admitted of no after-jealousy, of no change in the image of her that was gone.

I went to her that evening as to a meeting with a ghost, quiet footed, my hands chilled by the exquisite peril, my eyes blinded by dreams. How she would look upon me, with a gaze that I alone could understand! She also would be frightened. She would tauten like the stem of a daffodil caught in a sudden gust. Though her lips were tremulous, there would be in her face the repose—that repose within liveliness, that revealed depth beneath the sparkling surface of her—which had made me think, while I attempted her portrait, that it was possible to see within Nature an essence that transcended Nature; to have, not merely speculative, but sensuous vision of the soul. For this

encounter I had prepared myself. In all my imagining of it, she and I had been alone—not physically alone, perhaps, for the presence of others had always to be mistily reckoned with, but so ringed about by magic that there needed to be no counting of those beyond the ring. But before I reached the hall, a door opened, a blaze of light and what seemed an aggression of voices came out. I had imagined her—with the imagination not of reason but of emotion—waiting for me silently. Her laughter came to me now mingled with the laughter of a throng, careless, casual, politely merry. I halted, drew back a pace, and remained fixed.

Suddenly my arm was taken from behind and with friendly urgency I was drawn forward.

"I've been looking to the port," Mr. Fullaton said. "Ferrers is new to us, and decanting's a ticklish business." As we entered the drawing-room, he stooped to say in my ear: "We've been heralding your approach. All these people have been set talking about you. Clare could make any painter's fortune if she set her mind to it. Look them over at dinner; if there's a face you want to paint, it ought not to be difficult to arrange. And one commission leads to another."

I had in truth been heralded. Henry Fullaton's guests turned eagerly to greet, or rather to observe, his *protégé*. The glitter of two giant chandeliers fell upon them—a steady illumination for bald heads, a flickering streak for youthful

macassar, a mantle of light upon the younger girls, an enforcement of shadow beneath the bosoms of their mammas. Rather than their bodies, I saw their feet as I passed among them—the square black toes of the men pawing at the carpet-pattern, the pointed satin of women jutting out from the base of enflounced towers. Here and there my eye fell upon higher details—a fan swinging loose; trousers, still strapped beneath the instep, on a pair of frail old legs; a fob tangential to a rounded waistcoat; a flash of jet, a stream of pearls, a great cameo embedded in lace. The hand that grasped my arm continued to propel me; then released its grip.

I looked up.

"I am so glad you have come," said Clare's voice. "I do hope the journey wasn't too terribly trying." For a moment she held my hand, then gently let it go. "Ned," she said to a broad back at her side, "here's the guest of the evening."

"Oh, hello," said Ned. "It's good you've turned up. Now, don't forget, before all these people rain commissions on you—Clare's portrait comes first, is that a bargain?"

Clare guided me away. "You must be introduced to Miss Fullaton first," she said. "She's Ned's great-aunt—centuries old and nearly blind, but more alive than most of us."

I was led before an ancient lady whose large black eyes seemed never to despair of forcing clear vision through the greyish film that covered them. A shawl, wrapped round her shoulders and

neck, was fastened by a diamond brooch close to her chin; her satin gown, high at the waist and encircled there by a golden cord heavily tasselled, dragged thinly over her hips to a deep hem, stiffened with buckram and elaborately festooned; beneath this, five inches more of her spindly legs protruded than the enflounced towers of '76 dared to show. Her face, in those days when age accepted the marks of increasing years with naked patience, was so extraordinary that my young eyes were fascinated by it. It was a plaster of cosmetic—the more of a plaster, I suspect, because dim sight found a mirrored compensation in excess. The lips were red and of a straying outline, the cheeks a high uneven pink, the eyebrows black; but the lashes, which an unsteady hand could decorate no more, retained their natural whiteness. A drift of powder lay deep in the valleys and sparse on the ridges of the loose skin, and above all was a lace head-scarf magnificently coiled, which, in the time of its origin (and this, with the rest of Miss Fullaton's costume, was a sober reflection of the years that immediately followed Waterloo) would have been called a turban. I had an impression of being presented to a powerful and defiant image. She was a gash in the elegant atmosphere of the Windrush drawing-room.

"Henry tells me you are a young man of parts," she began in a deep rasping voice. "Sit down. . . . You need not shout, I am nearly blind, but not deaf."

"No," said Clare at once, preventing me from taking the stool that Miss Fullaton was energetically tapping with her stick. "Nigel can't sit with you now. He's this moment come. I must introduce him to people before dinner."

"Then he shall take me in."

"I am sorry. That's impossible now."

"Impossible? Indeed he shall and must."

"I have arranged my table."

"That's like you young people of to-day—stiff as starch. Arranged! Can't a table be rearranged?

"I'm sorry. Not now."

The old shoulders went up. "Well, you're mistress here. Age had privileges once."

Clare mocked her with a friendly laugh. "Age! You're younger than any of us. You will be telling me again that you were my age before Corunna was fought."

"And so I was. But 'tell you again,' you say. Do I repeat myself? That is a fault." She took a pink cachou from a silver box and laid it on her tongue. "Take him away, then. But do you return, Sir, when you tire of the broad-beamed ladies of the good Queen."

She had spoken loudly. The ladies to whom she referred had ears, but did not hear. Only Ned, who might have been supposed to be out of earshot, spun on his heel to silence this child of the eighteenth century. His brow was rumpled and his mouth a little pursed by distress; four indignant paces brought him to Clare's side. But

the cautious man did not remonstrate with his great-aunt; that would have delighted her and have been repaid with more rockets of Vauxhall exploded beneath the noses of his guests. His discreeter way was to rob her of an audience; she could not shout her abominations into empty air.

"You must introduce Nigel to the others, my dear," he said, coaxing his wife away. "You will excuse her, Great-Aunt, I'm sure, if she hurries on."

"Ah! I like you when you call me Great-Aunt, my dear Great-Nephew. That's your trumpet of war. That means you are angry with me," Miss Fullaton exclaimed, triumphantly jerking herself forward in her chair and expressing her joy of battle in her chin's upward thrust.

But Ned was already in strategic retreat, leaving her in possession of a desert field. As I was borne forward, I saw her chin sag to the diamond brooch, her body slacken, and her turban nod in isolated defeat. I was given no opportunity further to observe her. My hand was being shaken and my name purred over by Clare's guests. When they discovered, however, that I was not, as they had naturally supposed, related to the Gloucestershire Frews, they all found that this name of mine was a little difficult to remember.

"Pray, Mr.— Mr.——"

"Frew," said Clare.

"Of course, I beg your pardon. Pray, Mr. Frew, are you good at painting horses? So few artists

are, I find. Perhaps you do not come from the country yourself?"

Clare hurried me on, until I stood beneath a heavy bosom whereon a cameo of Love Pursuing affably heaved.

"How fortunate," said the voice above, "that Mr. Fullaton should have detected your talent so early, Mr.—er Mr. Frew! One hears so often of artists, doesn't one?—even those who now show their pictures regularly at Burlington House—who had to wait many years for their first recognition. You will be safe under Mr. Fullaton's wing. . . . Or perhaps in any case your own people—— Was your father an artist? . . . No? So much depends on early training in the arts, they say."

"If you ask me," this lady's husband put in, with a gleam of stopped teeth under a moustache of greying canary, "it's a mistake to spend all your life at one job—painting or anything else. A good liberal education first—that's what a young fellow needs. You, Sir, don't regret the time spent at your public school, I'll be bound?"

A swift intervention by Clare saved me from openly confessing that this privilege had been denied me, but the truth was plain to the cameo and the canary moustache. Thus little by little, as I was taken round the room, my history was investigated. I did not hunt, though I could, as I told them in hope of conciliation, ride; my family did not come from Gloucestershire, and, since there were no other Frews, was therefore without

origin; I had not been to a public school, I was not going to a University, I was dumb before Horatian tags, and I had done little but paint and draw since I was twelve.

"The deuce an' all, but don't you get tired of it?"

No, I didn't think I should ever tire of it.

"There now! Well, there's no accountin' for tastes."

About my father, many circuitous inquiries were made. I did not then guess the reason for so much curiosity. When a plump confiding lady in short white gloves patted me on the arm and said that of course one could see, in the eyes and chin, my likeness to dear Mr. Fullaton, I replied, without suspicion of malice, "Oh, but he's no relation of mine."

"No relation?"

"None at all."

"There, how foolish! And I was told that you were the son of a cousin of his."

"Oh no," said I, still unsuspecting, "there's no connexion at all. That's why I owe him so much for having taken me as his pupil. It will be wonderful working in his house. That's how everyone used to learn in the old days—in private studios; but nowadays one doesn't often get a chance."

"No, I suppose not." The short white gloves slid from my arm. If I was not, as she had hoped, a sinister echo from Mr. Fullaton's past, the

confiding lady had no interest in me. Why, pray, her disappointed eyebrows inquired, was I there at all?

It was this lady's daughter, Miss Lucy Currall, who was to be my partner at dinner, and Clare left us together. Miss Currall's dark brown hair had a rich gloss and was decorated at the neck with small ringlets. Her receding chin and bunched lips, her cheeks that curved high and full beneath her eyes, and her slightly aquiline nose gave her an appearance of the young Queen on an early coin. She had, moreover, in receiving me, an air of severity which strengthened this regal impression. She had been hoping, it may be, for another squire; she was doomed to the painter boy.

She took my arm for the stately procession. Seated beside her at a long table of trailing smilax and gilt epergnes, I did my best to please her, but my thoughts strayed from our uneasy conversation. I was swept by alternate waves of humiliation and defiance—of humiliation because Clare's competent friendliness had seemed to be friendliness towards a stranger; of defiance as I discovered that this group of men and women, who quietly despised me, was representative of the inertia of the world into which I was now plunged. Why had I been afraid of them? Why had I troubled to conciliate them like a shy boy at his first school —saying childishly, so that their lips had flickered at my awkward attempt, that, though I did not ride to hounds, yet I rode? There was no defeating

them on their own ground; nor, my heart said, with the joined but differing angers of an upstart and an artist, was their ground worth my winning. Who was I to them? Who should I ever be to any but myself? Yet there crept into my mind the thought: "When I have succeeded, these people will bow down. . . ." But that thought was poison and I strove to put it from me. My work itself must be my reward. If Clare had become one with these who surrounded me, then she was not the Clare I had known. I must not seek to please her. I must work alone, with no company but that of an earlier Clare remembered within me.

I fell into meditation on painting and returned to my own solitudes, for deliberate solitude is youth's retort to a contemptuous or indifferent world. Those who neglect us, we will ourselves neglect. It is a consoling self-flattery and the world can show good reason for laughing at it. "The hermit makes a palace of his cell," they scornfully declare, "because the palace gates are shut to him." Yet, though solitude is in one aspect ludicrous pride, in another it may be proud necessity. All the compulsions of the soul are ludicrous to those who are not compelled. Faith, love, the desire to be alone, the creative passion, being the movements of a pygmy towards his god, are ludicrous in the eyes of pygmies who neither move nor wish to move. The devil of it is that these static pygmies may claim that sense of humour which it is polite to value above truth, whereas

the moving pygmies seldom possess it, and can be made to appear fools unless they prove themselves to be men of genius.

Miss Currall, I discovered, was busily chatting to her other neighbour about national humour—English, Scottish, Irish. Was it this that had directed my own thought? I had not heard her words. A panic seized me that long ago she had addressed some question to me to which I blankly had not replied.

"I doubt," I said foolishly and at random, "whether a sense of humour is as valuable as you think."

"Really?" she said, and turned away again.

She herself had a sense of humour and kept the man on her right hand amused by mimicry of their acquaintance. The ringlets bobbed with animation on the nape of her neck. She was a cruel mimic. Her hearer guffawed his approval; others leaned towards her to lend applause of laughter; and I saw Clare smiling down the table because her party was so merry and talkative a success.

The animation of that evening died with the guests' departure, not to be renewed until guests came again. When the last carriage had rolled away, silence fell upon the house and the sparkle went from Clare's eyes. Ned congratulated her on her party. "There'll not be a more popular woman in the county," he said, and she was pleased by

his praise, though too weary to respond to it. Only Henry Fullaton would not allow high spirits to flag. "To bed! To bed!" he cried, handing out candles which he had lighted. "You'll be up with the birds in the morning, my dear, and feeling as fresh—and looking as pretty, I'll be bound. . . . Make sure of the bolts, Ned. . . . Good night to you. Good night, my dear." With that he kissed Clare and, throwing an arm across my shoulders, swung away upstairs. "Nine-thirty in the studio," was his parting shot. How dead the house seemed when he was gone, and his indomitable whistling could be heard no more!

He, Ned, and I met in the dining-room for breakfast. It seemed not to be the room of the night before, so wide were its spaces now and so resounding all footsteps beyond the rugs. Tall windows looked south over lawns and flowery terraces to where the stream of the Windrush, marked for an observer on the ground-level only by a row of willows that grew on its farther bank, divided the garden from the lower meadows. Henry Fullaton threw open one of these windows and with broad gestures gave me my bearings on the countryside.

The Fullaton property occupied a low triangular table-land between Thrusted Hill to the east and two converging valleys that met in Windrush —a long straggling village, hidden now, but visible from my bedroom window, whence, earlier that morning, I had looked westward over a clump

of fir-trees and wondered why the church, whose Norman tower rose near the tree-tops, was so far from all its parishioners save those who lived in the Manor.

"And on the way down from Thrusted," said Mr. Fullaton, "we trap the stream. And there"—he stretched his arm to the south-west—"is our lake, pleasant to be lazy on in summer, but not a challenge to seamanship—eh, Ned?"

I felt that this estate and country were very dear to my host, and knew from Richard that Ned was scarcely less proud of them. But Ned was in bad humour that morning and hung behind, rattling the handle of the window. When he did speak, it was to urge us to breakfast.

"Clare coming?" said his father.

"Too tired," Ned answered shortly.

"Not ill, I hope?"

"Oh no—she says not."

If Henry Fullaton was aware of the irritation in his son's tone, he took no notice of it, but allowed his tongue to wag as if all the world were as free of misgiving and as full of happy self-confidence as he. He ate as heartily as he spoke, and rose at once when his meal was finished, pulling out his watch and looking at it, not as most men look at theirs—with an air of reluctant calculation, but with positive eagerness as if he had never in his life found any but good news written on its face. "Twenty minutes," he said. "You'll find me in the studio."

Ned munched on with preoccupied melancholy; but there were storms on his brow, and I escaped from his uneasy company as soon as I could. As I opened the studio door, the smell of turpentine and linseed came to me and with it a desire to be at work. It was easy to forget that Henry Fullaton was indeed what Mr. Doggin had called him—a second-rate artist, so great a fascination was there in his love of the history and methods of his art. That flow of conversation which, when directed to general subjects, fell so often into a kind of turbulent facetiousness, was now unexpectedly fresh and strong. Emotion and vision he had not, but knowledge he had, and of his knowledge sprang a critical reverence so profound and so clearly of the heart as well as of the mind that I would look at his canvases and wonder how any man who knew the hand of his chosen masters so well could, in his own practice, run so contrary to their spirit. It was not until later that I understood that his approach to art was a scientific approach. He admired men of science above all the world. They only who harnessed the forces of nature or established what he was pleased to call a "finally ascertained truth" seemed to him to be of substantial value. "We artists," he would say, "I wonder whether our importance isn't all a gigantic hoax. Do we matter so much?" And painting was the sphere of his scientific investigation. He saw pictures through an imaginary lens. What medium had this man used and why?

How had he prepared his ground and with what effect upon the absorption or declaration of pigment? By what process of glaze and scumbling had Titian obtained the interior glow peculiar to him? When I said that Rubens also had obtained an interior glow, though of a different quality, his prejudices leapt upon him and, because he hated Rubens' choice of subject, he found it hard to do justice to the artist. But this stern man of science was determined above all to be just. "Yet," he said, disciplining his own impulses, "you are right to speak of Rubens, for, though his product is not for my pleasure, his method is instructive."

"He's not to my taste either," I said, "though, if I see him beside Van Dyck, I'm always tempted to think that in England we have grossly overestimated Van Dyck. When I see Rubens, I feel always: there's a giant—not my particular giant, but one of the great exuberant giants for all that."

We began to dispute about Rubens until, beyond the intention of either, both became partisans.

"I believe," said Mr. Fullaton with heat, "that you like Rubens no better than I do. Has someone told you that you should admire him?"

I shook my head and, for a moment, was so angry that I could not answer. We looked at each other in surprise that we had come so near to quarrelling. Then, with a swift movement, he made me look at him, and laughed with such good humour that I could not but laugh back.

"There," said he, "we're friends again. The integrity of artistic opinion is holy ground to you, isn't it? I trod on it. I'm sorry."

"And I for losing my temper."

"Ha!" he cried. "But if you hadn't you'd have been my kind of artist. Do you see? I'm a slave of common sense. I don't boast a holy ground."

My friends who now, in my old age, proclaim my work and see in Henry Fullaton's only a thin, half-forgotten, photographic blot on certain provincial galleries, find it hard to believe that I was his pupil, and laugh when I acknowledge my debt to him. Yet it is true that he had much to teach. The end he sought was not my end, nor was his devotion mine, but he made me understand that, however free an artist's imagination may be, his craft must be disciplined with a discipline that is itself beloved. An artist must have joy in the difficulties of his medium; if not, he avoids them and misses the opportunities which they imply. If he be a writer, it is not enough that he think wisely and, as careless men will have it, "say what he thinks." To write is not merely to inform the mind or flatter the senses; it is, by the art of words, so to entice or subdue the soul that it may enter, through illusion at once intellectual and sensuous, into a truth (or, indeed, a lie) beyond statement. Each word and phrase, their chiming and clashing, their ebb and flow; the grave peacefulness, the laughter, the song, all the rhythms of language—these are the instruments of enticement or subju-

gation. A writer must use them with joy, not as paid servants to be driven hither and thither by his careless will, but as precious ambassadors, for, though he command them, they interpret him beyond his commission, saying now less than he hoped, now more than he dreamed of. So the instruments of a painter's craft are often his masters, though they appear to obey him. He corrects a tone that has seemed too strong; instantly, when his correction is made, other tones burn elsewhere to an unsuspected strength; and they reveal to him a new passage of the imagination. Standing back to consider his canvas, he finds that it is whispering fresh secrets to him—not his secrets but its own. Now is the test of the craftsman. The little undisciplined trickster will thank heaven for a piece of luck (for so he will regard it), but he will not dare to use, for fear that he may destroy, it. The gay, lazy fellow, who disguises ignorance in chatter of broad effect, will likewise praise fortune for her gift and dab cheerfully in hope of another. But an artist who is a craftsman also, hearing a secret whispered by the chance of paint, will perceive the miraculous harvest which may spring from that chance and by his disciplined craftsmanship gather it to his canvas. Henry Fullaton was not capable of seeing miracles from afar. But it was he who taught me where to seek, and how, in what he called the "joy of spade-work," to use them.

We were drawn by our discussions into an intimate companionship which appeared scarcely at all to the outside world. As my own habit of mind became more and more exclusive and withdrawn, Mr. Fullaton left me to control my own hours, wondering, perhaps, at what must have seemed to him a boy's unnatural concentration on work, but content not to interfere with it. He welcomed me in the studio whenever I went thither, and, if I was absent, asked only questions that had no reproach in them. "Have you been taking a holiday?" he would ask, and when I replied, "Yes, a kind of holiday; I have been painting out of doors," he would say, with a tug at his big beard, that it was good to be completely lazy sometimes and to live as other men lived.

The days of spring were sweet and clear, but they filled me with sadness, for I could not keep pace with the desires that arose in me nor distinguish them. They were like the humming of insects—a sound that is itself a part of silence; each hour their note was changed, and at night the recollection of them was confused and dim. To live as other men lived? That, at any rate, was no part of my purpose. I wished to escape farther and farther from them, as if that hum of the air were drawing me into a forest, where I should at last find revealed the mystery for which I was seeking. But I did not know what mystery I hoped to discover—only that there would be tranquillity in it and perhaps an explanation of

that feeling of urgency without reason which now possessed me. All day I painted, or thought of painting; it had become for me a hunger. And once, when Henry Fullaton had been speaking of monkish painters, I began to envy them their seclusion and to feel that only in what I supposed to have been their singleness of heart could an artist's peace be found.

I had little contact with the Fullaton household, and Ned, I think, soon ceased to notice whether I was present at meals or absent from them. Now and then he made laborious attempts to take an interest in my work. Would not the view from the other side of Thrusted make a good landscape? Why did I so often work in the studio on bright days and go out to paint only when the sky was overcast? But his questions were asked for the sake of asking, as they had been at Mr. Trobey's dinner-table, and, in spite of an intelligently crumpled forehead, he scarcely heard my answers. On one point only was he insistent—that I should again start on Clare's portrait. He made even a laughing threat; there must be a portrait of her, and if I would not provide it, well, then—the suggestion was that some sharper fellow should have the commission. But I felt that, even when he appeared most urgent, he was more pleased than disappointed by my refusals. His suggestion seemed to be a reluctant act of generosity, intended to please her, or, perhaps, to show how broad-minded he was. "You see," his manner said, "I

put no obstacles in the way of her artistic whims. On the contrary, though I think them great nonsense, I do everything I can to indulge them. If Nigel won't paint her, and it seems that he won't or can't, though he never directly refuses —well, I'm not to blame!" She exhibited, however, less gratitude than her self-sacrificing husband deserved, and smiled roguishly at my encounters with him as if it amused her to watch two men so hopelessly at cross-purposes on her account.

She treated me always with cool gaiety, welcoming my company rather than avoiding it. How much she had learned in less than a year of the history of Windrush and the Fullatons, and with what an easy, possessive grace she told it! She made herself my guide to the house, the family portraits, the gardens, the home farm on the lower slopes of Thrusted, and, as she stood on the edge of the Fullaton plateau and pointed across the valleys, to the neighbouring countryside. Was her pleasure in these things even then an affectation, a defence? Did she sometimes, remembering a lover in her guest, insist the more on playing a hostess's part? I could meet her on the polite ground she had chosen. I could hear her speak and reply to her, encounter her gently curious gaze and quietly return it; I could stroll across the lawns at her side without remembrance of the past. In all this she remained a beautiful woman who was Ned's wife, my hostess, old

Fullaton's beloved daughter-in-law—remote from the inner current of my thought. For days and weeks it would be so. I would see her by chance now and then—an encounter before Admiral Fullaton's portrait at the foot of the stairs, a visit to the library together to find some book of which she knew the shelf—and, when we parted, my mind would be instantly emptied of her. But I was not always invulnerable. Once she rose from a window-seat in which curtains had concealed her, and once her hands were folded on her lap; once I entered a room without her knowledge and saw her as she was in solitude, the pretences of gaiety fallen from her; once, as we walked through the grounds together, she said: "Nigel, are you happy painting here? Is it all going to come true?"—and the world shrank suddenly to my vision of her, all the walls of reality rushed in upon her brightness, and I caught my breath and could not speak. As she saw this, her eyes became frightened and tender, and an area of her cheeks beneath the cheek bones lost blood. These were not Mrs. Fullaton's cheeks and eyes. I remembered them as of the dead. My limbs became weak and my fingers ached.

I had been standing with Clare on the bridge at the lake's eastern end. There I left her and returned across the lawns alone. As I approached the house a white cap appeared in the darkness of an upper window, and Miss Fullaton's face beneath it. Her hand moved, perhaps beckoning

to me, perhaps bidding me stay where I was. I paused for a moment, but was about to go forward again, telling myself that I had mistaken some trick of light for a gesture, when a second figure appeared in the window and Miss Fullaton's maid threw it open.

"Miss Fullaton says, Sir, will you come up here, please?"

Two rooms of the house were Miss Fullaton's own. Her sitting-room was lighted by four windows looking south and ran the whole length of the dining-room below; her bedroom communicated with it by a doorway cut for her in recent years. In the first of these she had accumulated the possessions of her long life—furniture of many periods, a spinet at which she would still play when warm weather freed her stiffening fingers, and a great number of water-colours and small engravings in the history of which she delighted. The room was, however, so large that her collection gave it a friendly rather than a crowded air. She herself, when I entered, was seated on a couch near the window, but withdrawn a little from the sun.

"So you will not paint Clare's portrait, I hear," she began when I stood before her.

"It isn't a question of 'will not,' " I answered.

"Cannot then? That's worse. Why—'cannot'? Was not Velasquez a Court painter? D'ye think he chose his subjects? I give him more credit."

"But I am not Velasquez."

She grinned at me. "If not Clare, what do you want to paint, then? Ain't she handsome enough to please you?"

I said I was painting other things.

"Studies with my nephew Henry?"

"And the country—and the church."

"The church!" said she. "Then you might have taste for a ruin. They put a portrait of me over the mantelpiece in Trafalgar year—not in my honour, I assure you, for I was a daughter of a younger son, but in honour of my father's frigate, which you may have seen pretty plain in the background. A frigate he called me—or a privateer." A mischievous smile stretched the wrinkles of her face. "Will you paint the wreck, Sir?"

It would not be enough, I knew, to paint the broken timbers, I must discover in them the ship. Could I paint the woman who looked out still from those straining filmy eyes? Could I overlay impulse with experience, pleasure with its price, youth's defiance of the world with age's valiant enjoyment of it? Could I preserve in paint the strange transparency of Miss Fullaton's years, so that, through raddling and distortion, vigour might still gleam and, through weariness, might flash those delights and angers which were its unregretted cause? To show her as she was—unashamed but not shameless; to exhibit in her that rare product of worldliness, a cynic who is not a spiritual dullard—that would be my task, and a task, I thought, that will bear me coolly

through the late spring, struggling for the texture of that plastered flesh and keeping her diamonds bright under the chin's shadow. "Will you wear your diamond brooch?" I said. "The one you were wearing on my first evening at Windrush?"

She nodded. "Shall you begin to-day?"

"If you will put on the dress you wore that night—may I come back and begin a drawing this afternoon?"

I added that for the painting I should need a panel, and began to tell her of the preparation of the ground. She grinned again at my jargon and waved me away.

"The fee?" she asked as I reached the door; then, before I could reply, "I shall make my own fee," she said. "I always have."

Were there, then, many portraits of her, I asked, and her eyes glistened as they came up to me under their white lashes.

"All the men in the world are not painters," said she, "nor all payments in guineas."

In spite of her great age, Miss Fullaton could be still. Except when she fell asleep and I, ringing for her maid, crept from the room, she knew how, in her stillness, to remain alive, and I was happy while I painted her. She never asked to see my work in progress—a rare abstinence in a sitter which I attributed at first to consideration for the

artist; but slowly, as I came to know her better and observed with how lively a curiosity she regarded me, I began to understand that the portrait was in her eyes but an excuse for regularly commanding my presence. The subjects of which she wished to speak were approached either with overwhelming abruptness designed to force an answer unawares, or by a skilfully circuitous route that would end in capture by surprise. Her abrupt attacks were hard to counter, but I became gradually so familiar with her slower method that I could guess from afar whither she was leading me. Not, however, until the portrait was well advanced did I realize that all her industrious paths led in the end to one central point of curiosity—to myself, to Clare, to my relations with her and hers with Ned, and, above all, to my own future (or rather my own ideas concerning it), in which, it seemed, the old lady saw a weather-cock for all winds.

She began by assuming, though certainly she did not believe it, that all I wanted was to become a famous and successful painter and to enjoy a handsome woman as my wife; having said as much in a series of swift challenges and elaborate avoidances, she awaited my denials. Feigning to disbelieve them when given, she awaited denials yet hotter and the confessions that might be supposed to follow them. When I retreated into silence, she would fall away innocently into histories of the past, approaching to-day warily

down the generations she had known, chuckling over ancient follies, flinging at follies more recent, stabbing a brilliant romance with an ironic shaft.

Sometimes she would revive romance for the sake of stabbing it in my presence. Once she sent me to bring a hair ornament from a vast painted *armoire* that stood beside her fireplace; then to the drawing-room for a miniature; and told me the story of them.

The girl in the miniature had been a cousin of Miss Fullaton's—the daughter and orphan of a yet younger son than the frigate's commander. She was, however, the ward of the reigning Fullatons, her uncle and aunt, who guarded her more jealously than a child of their own, for her father had married into debased mercantile prosperity and the girl was an heiress, if not in land, at least in the Funds. The portrait, which I was permitted to hold in my hand, showed her wearing the hair ornament that now sat awry on Miss Fullaton's head—a half-circuit of golden bay-leaves, a Napoleonic imitation of ancient Rome. It was given to her "soon after the peace" by a gentleman who, though of good birth, was lamentably French and poor. She did not dare to wear it or show it to her uncle and aunt, but when she was sent, with a servant as *duenna*, to have her miniature painted, she persuaded the artist to paint two miniatures—one for Windrush crownless, the other for Paris crowned. When she was of age and rich, she would herself go to Paris,

she thought, for a coronation long postponed. But before she could be safely rid of it the wrong miniature fell into her guardians' hands. Why a duplicate? they demanded, and—upon closer inspection—whence the crown? They sent her to bed like a child ("that bed," said Miss Fullaton), and, in her presence, ransacked her possessions. In a cupboard ("that cupboard," said Miss Fullaton, pointing to the giant painted so elegantly in faded green with trailing roses) they found letters in French, and more letters in English, tied with a different ribbon, which were copies, laboriously made, of her replies. "Replies you may call them," Miss Fullaton added, "though she needed no prompting, my little cousin." Downstairs the letters came and the little cousin was dressed and brought downstairs with them. There, in family council, they were read aloud, read and hummed over and tut-tutted, until their owner, at first convulsed with shame and tears, had had time to become dry-eyed and to re-shape her will. "I was here then," said Miss Fullaton—"much older than she; I must have been near thirty. I saw her come out of the library as if she had been whipped, and, more because I hated them than loved her, I kissed her and went with her upstairs. Few kisses have been more profitable, for it was to me she left her fortune."

"But why not to the poor Frenchman?" I asked.

"Because he took fever in the South Americas while trying to become a rich one. That was after

she was of age," Miss Fullaton said, "and I do not doubt but that if he had lived she would presently have escaped to him, not having set eyes on him, poor little fool, for above five years. Instead she wrote a letter of farewell to her aunt and uncle and threw herself with her crown into the ornamental waters."

"Into the lake?" I asked.

"I used the words of her own letter," said Miss Fullaton. "You may read it if you will, Sir. It is in the upper drawer to the left—the one with the chipped knob."

How, I inquired, as I considered the story after returning to my brushes, had the lovers' correspondence been carried between them? Who was the intermediary? That, Miss Fullaton replied, no one ever discovered. And did no one guess? No one, she believed.

"Was it you, Miss Fullaton?"

"Ha!" she cried so merrily that I could have believed it to be a girl's laughter. "That is how legends begin! No, it was not I. How could it have been? The house to which my father retired was on the other slope of Thrusted, six miles away —burned to the ground in '52. I was not often there, and less often here at Windrush, for my uncle had young children of the good Queen's pattern, and I was suspected of iniquity. Oh no! you may be assured, it was not I."

"Your father, then?" I hazarded.

"My father?" She twisted her lips to a grimace

and looked at me sidelong. Then, drawing in her breath with a little whistling sound, "Who knows? Who knows?" she said. "And I never had wind of it!"

For half an hour I painted in silence. Then, with a peculiar jerk of the head and a stiff movement of the shoulders, which were signs that the sitting was at an end, she declared the purpose of her story. "I should like you to give Clare that crown." She held it out.

"But your cousin was drowned in it."

"No matter. You need not tell her that."

"I expect she knows. She knows most of the Fullaton history."

"And has told it to you?"

"Yes."

"It doesn't interest you, then?"

"Oh yes, it does."

"But you would choose that she spoke to you of other things?" And, as I neither answered nor took up the crown, she said, "You will not give it to her, Sir? Is it all superstition that stays you? Then listen: there is another superstition of which, may be, you have heard—that no curse rests with a lover's gift. Does that persuade you? Or is it that I make you my messenger, and so the gift is mine still? There, I give it to you. Take it. It is yours. Do what you will with it."

I took the crown, for the hands in which she stretched it out were trembling and it would have fallen to the ground.

"If ever I paint her portrait I will give it to her then," I said.

"But you paint churches and old women," Miss Fullaton answered, "and you hate it when I speak of her. You were not born, you know, to paint stones and sticks."

I said it was not the stones and sticks that I was trying to paint.

"But what then?" she replied swiftly. "The spirit in them? And what spirit—God's? May be you will find more of that in a handsome body than the monks suppose. If not, why did he create 'em handsome? There is only one other answer, not so creditable to Omnipotence. You are afraid, young man! Take your crown with you and in God's name—yes, I mean it, if you will—in God's name find a use for it!"

Clare found me returning the miniature to its place. I told her nothing of the crown, which had been left in my own room, but asked her if she knew the tale of the girl at whose portrait we were looking.

"Yes," she said, "but are you not tired of hearing the family history from me? I think you are."

"Or are you tired of telling it?" I asked.

Her smile had misgiving in it. "I was very proud of it. I am still. I think I love Windrush; there's coolness and leisure here and a kind of sweet order that delights me. The place is full of echoes of the past, so little disturbed that I wonder

sometimes whether it can continue or whether we in our generation are not enjoying the last of it. That made me very jealous of it at first. I used to imagine people—perhaps fifty years hence—looking back and saying enviously of me: 'She saw the end of English country-house life. After her, *le déluge*.' So I made up my mind to enjoy every minute of it as if—as if (is it a fantastic idea?) I were really one of those who lived *après le déluge*, but by some miracle had been given power to cast myself back into our present time."

She paused then and, turning upon me a wide, serious gaze, added: "But then, looking back with the eyes of those who will live fifty years hence, I saw myself as they will see me—going round the house again and again, telling the family history endlessly until people who heard me began to smile at my pride in it—until I began to smile myself, until I grew old, Nigel, with nothing done and nothing fought for and nothing to hand down. That girl in the miniature—I dare say she was a romantic fool. Still, she fought for something; she did leave a legend behind."

There was an appeal in Clare's voice which drew me towards her. How beautiful she is, I thought, and how much more beautiful she was and might still be! But I hurried away from her with cruel abruptness, so that she must have thought her confidence an indiscretion and have read in my action a rebuff. As I went from her, I longed to turn back. As I went across the lawns

and the upper meadow on my way to the church, I longed to abandon all caution, to run to her, to transform the world as the world cannot by a passionate impulse be transformed. But while I desired this, I desired also to be free of her and to forget her. When I had come down from Flock Hill, it was from this confusion that I had cast myself free; now it was upon me, and I saw no escape from it except in an absolute renunciation.

In Windrush church I found that I had brought with me no materials for my drawings of it, but I sat down none the less and allowed the silence to comfort me. The spring that brought me to Windrush was already advanced into summer, and the breeze through the open door was rich and warm. The church was of more than common size, Norman in origin and round arched, but bearing in its roof and its few monuments the marks of later periods, and having the peculiar, childlike charm of the early faithfulness of man. And I began to wonder how one of the builders of the church or the sculptor who carved the angel on Peter Fullaton's tomb would consider the course before him, if he were sitting now in my place and his age were about my own. To what end would his work be done? To satisfy a necessity within himself? To earn the praise of men? To the glory of God, simply? His answer would have been: "To the glory of God." What did that mean? To look for reward in heaven or to offer to God something that he needed? And

I perceived that to work to the glory of God was not to earn rewards or to bring gifts; it was the natural opening of a flower to the sun. But though, as I watched through the church door the sun throw its yellow and white pattern on the graves and headstones, I found a lulling consolation in these answers, I knew the glory of God was to me a wish and a mystery, not a compelling impulse. I could think of him and believe in him as I could think of the sunlight beyond the church, but I could not feel the warmth of his presence about me. If it had now been my task to decorate the old Fullaton tomb, I might have made it beautiful, but could not have made it childlike and holy as the old sculptor had done.

This tomb had drawn my gaze towards it when first I entered the church, and never since, at any revisiting, had it failed to command me. It was the family's earliest monument; they were buried now in a different vault beneath the graveyard. Peter Fullaton lay armed, a smoothed and battered figure, his head to the north, his body sloping away towards the southern wall, so that to one who stood fairly in the church's midst what most conspicuously appeared was the higher and northern end of the tomb. On this the sculptor had carved an angel ascending. Her head was a little inclined to her right as if she were looking back upon the earth she had left, her wings fell straightly at her sides, her feet were pointed downwards, for in the air through which she

moved they bore no burden. In her arms, which were formally crossed, she carried a child. They had laughed at me at Windrush when I had spoken of the angel. "They say the man carved it in revenge," Ned declared with confidence, as if the legend were to him satisfying and probable. "Peter is supposed to have robbed him of something. Your angel was not an angel, but one of Peter's mistresses, Elizabeth Bask, and the child was a deformed bastard he had by her. I must say it looks deformed to me—a wretched little brat in any case."

"I'll not believe it," I had answered.

Ned had shrugged his shoulders. "Why not?"

"Because the angel is an angel. You can feel it in every line. And the man who carved it was not working in revenge. If ever there was work of love——"

"Love? Peter, by all accounts, wasn't a particularly lovable fellow."

It was not, I thought, looking at the figure again, for the love of any man that the sculptor worked, but I did not doubt that the child had been for him the soul of Peter Fullaton, carried in rebirth towards God. Then, gazing at the angel, I wondered to discover how little of the flesh it was, though beautiful in the flesh, and how it seemed less a body than a spirit made manifest in earthly form. Was the man who wrought it able so to regard women? Were they to him spirits awaiting their summons to a freer

spirituality? In that faith an artist might indeed work in peace to the glory of God. But, even as I envied so untroubled a condition of life, my thought became inflamed and, with my eyes still upon the Fullaton tomb, I imagined before me Clare naked, with her arms folded crosswise on her breast. "Even in this church, where I have come so near to peace, there is no escape for me," my heart cried, for in that instant I desired her. I rose and went out of the place. Never before had I desired her body, nor, as I went across the graveyard, did I continue to desire it. That had been a flash of madness. Yet it was true that at Lisson my soul had worshipped her, and true also that, if she could become now as she had been then, I should worship her again and happily be lost in her. From this spiritual longing I did not know how to be free, for what I worshipped was ghostly and could not die or be destroyed. "Except by the mercy of God," was the answer that the early sculptor would have given. "But how shall a man pray," I thought, "that the desire of his own soul be changed?" It was an old question, and I wished, as I walked home across the meadows, that I could hear Cranmer's answer to it.

The ecclesiastical drawings I had been making were allowed to lie for some time unheeded in a drawer in Henry Fullaton's studio, for, except on Sundays, when in the crowd of worshippers all influence seemed neutralized, I was reluctant to

return to Windrush church. Reluctant to return, yet dissatisfied in absence. Seeking a root of this dissatisfaction I perceived a division in my life. I felt that before my art could flower I must dedicate my art, and before my life could flower I must dedicate my life. But the two dedications were opposed. The first led me towards withdrawal and asceticism, yet I was not a natural ascetic; the second towards the love of one who, though her body lived, was already vanished. I hung in air. I would not go to the church, for by the presence of the Fullaton angel the conflict would be sharpened.

With Miss Fullaton's portrait I was on firm ground. While painting it, and often while I struggled with the problems that Henry Fullaton's fertile brain continually suggested, I forgot all else and was happy. Only when not so occupied was I tormented by seekings and avoidances. In my endeavour to escape from them, I shut the doors of my mind more and more closely upon the world until even my outward aspect must have changed, for Miss Fullaton would exclaim, when she saw me, that I was working too much, and once Clare said, with a peculiar sadness in her smile: "Do you never hear me when I speak, Nigel? Where do your thoughts wander to?"

And presently, as if the answer to my frustrations were surely there, I began to go again to the church, and to sit for long hours while the beams of daylight wheeled in the chancel and the angel

on the Fullaton tomb rose perpetually heavenward, bearing my captive imagination with the child in her arms. At first, if I heard a footstep, I would stir and be recalled, but in time I heard no more footsteps in the church or voices in the graveyard, but was able to enclose myself and to gather strength in solitude for the work I was to do on the morrow. Nothing else had reality for me but my painting and these wrapt hours in which my painting had its source. "Young man," Miss Fullaton said, "have a care! You are driving yourself mad. You don't know in what world you are living." But I paid no heed to her. If this was madness, it was madness that I had long desired and would not forsake. My work, I knew, was better than it had ever been.

Late one afternoon, after the purest light had failed, I went to the church through rain. The interior was gloomy and bleak, but I loved it none the less. After a little while the rain ceased, and the sky, clearing rapidly before high winds, permitted the last weak brilliance of day to enter the building before sunset. The stone of Peter Fullaton's angel was enriched with sudden gold, not as English stone is commonly gilded by the sun, but in such a way as makes the stone of Italy seem now and then aglow with a kind of serene gaiety that causes the passer-by to worship and to smile. While I contemplated this and knew that so extraordinary a subtlety of light, which was neither coldness nor warmth, had no equivalent

in paint, I looked up and found Clare standing beside me.

"Do you know," she said, "how late it is?" Then in a changed voice: "What are you looking at, Nigel? Why do you shut me out?"

"I am looking at the angel," I said. "Was that done in revenge, do you think?"

"Ned told you that?"

"Yes."

"It is an old legend that he repeats."

"And do you believe it?"

"Not now," she answered, and, leaving me, she went to the tomb and knelt beside it to examine the angel more closely. "Why," I thought, as my eyes followed her, "have I been so long afraid, and why have I said that what I love is a ghost and vanished from the earth? She kneels there now as beautiful as the angel and as holy as she." And, indeed, when she rose and came towards me, so that the light fell upon her and threw her shadow across the inscribed stones in the aisle, I remembered neither that she had once failed me nor my own desire for her.

"Why do you stay here alone?" she asked.

And I replied: "So that you might come to me as you have come, though I did not know it."

Her lips parted, and her hands, which had been folded at her breast, fell to her sides. She would have said more—perhaps have touched me; but she waited silently with her face transfigured.

"Walk home with me, then," she said at last.

"Your eyes are tired, and I am tired—you have shut me out so long."

The last of the day was on the meadows and the sky was washed for a clear morning.

"Perhaps we shall remember this," she said, "and not be strangers again."

Clare had foretold a fine day after the late rains, and next morning, when I looked out, the earth seemed to have been created anew. So green were the lawns and meadows that my eyes were dazzled by them, and the roofs of Windrush village, where they lay beyond the shadow of Thrusted, seemed to have been thatched in a fairy tale with gold and silver straw.

I had felt when I awoke, before the reason of day re-entered my mind, that some great happiness was awaiting me, and had imagined for a flashing moment that the source of this exhilaration was some passage of my work happily begun and now to be completed. But, as I dreamily cast about for such an explanation, Clare returned to my consciousness as a beautiful ship glides into harbour, silently transforming it. "She is come again," I thought with thanksgiving and wonder. I came slowly to clear remembrance of what had passed. Then I sprang up and ran to my window and, looking out, felt that I also had been renewed with the world, and was now beginning a fresh and more abundant life.

Nevertheless, when I was alone with Clare later in the day, I was uneasy, for there was the beginning of secrecy in her eyes, and now, if ever, there was nothing secret in my heart. The joy I had was joy to sing of. I would have told her that yesterday I found Clare Sibright again —the Clare who, during the last months, had been concealed and locked away from me. But when I would have spoken of this, I saw that she was looking into the future and judging the chances and duties of the world. I wished only to rejoice in the present; she was matching to-day with the days that were past and to come. What shall I do now? she seemed to ask herself. Our thought moved on different planes and we could not reach each other; for to spiritual love there is no outlet in action. It is a cloistered ecstasy; and in such an ecstasy I was now living.

But few are fitted to endure in it long, and she was wiser than I. Though I made no decision to turn my eyes again upon the world, the world flowered before me. I became aware of much that I had hitherto passed over—of the happy vigour of my body; of colour's richness, and not as before chiefly of its subtlety, so that my canvases became jewelled and warm and my palette bolder; even of the sensuous glories of Windrush church, which appeared now, not as the product of withdrawal from the life of men, but as an exaltation of life's splendours—an act of praise and aspiration rather than of humility. And, when I recalled

to my imagination the pale face and deeply burning eyes which I had supposed to belong to the sculptor of the Fullaton angel, they seemed the eyes and face of a stranger, and there rose up before me a youth, like David himself, highly coloured, eager, full of expectation.

"You are a queer fellow," Henry Fullaton commented, "you are changing your style while I watch you. The portrait you are doing of my aunt is already out of date."

"It will come to no harm," I said. "The fact that it is being painted smoothly on a panel makes it a thing apart. Besides, the subject is a subject apart."

There, at least, I had no desire to change my treatment. In her portrait there would be no confusion of manner. "But it is true," I thought, "that elsewhere I am painting differently and with a different impulse."

About this time it began to be discussed whether Ned and Clare should go to London for a part of the Season, Ned at first suggesting it, I think, to please her rather than himself, but stubbornly persisting afterwards when he discovered that she did not wish to leave Windrush. She did her best to restrain him from public argument on the subject, but, whenever the weather was wet or she happened to say: "What shall we do this evening?" he could not resist returning to the attack and pointing out to her that, if she were in London, wet weather would

have readier compensations and no evening would be unoccupied.

"But you love the country, Ned. All your interests are here, and these are the best of all the months at Windrush."

"It looks to me," he answered, "as if all your interests were here, too."

"I love Windrush, as you know."

"And it looks as if your interests weren't easily transferred with me to London," he went on steadily.

"Well," she said, disregarding his meaning, "you can't take the view from Thrusted with you."

"I wasn't talking of the view from Thrusted."

She smiled still, but was swift to the unmistakable challenge. "Of what, then? Do you imagine that I am about to run away with George Currall?—there is no one else of an age. Ned, you're being ridiculous."

"Ridiculous or not," said he, feeling perhaps that his fit of undirected jealousy had carried him too far, and patting her shoulder as if to conciliate a child, "ridiculous or not, I want you to come to London with me." Hitherto, he had recognized my presence with an occasional glance; now in his eagerness he forgot it altogether. "I want to have you alone for a little while," he added.

She walked past him and, losing for an instant her skill in fence, her power of quelling his seriousness with banter, she began to speak so abruptly of other and trivial things that her

avoidance dangerously emphasized what she had wished to conceal—that not only his insistence upon it, but his affection itself, had been for a moment distasteful to her. My thought flew back to the picture of her that had been formed in my mind while I was yet at Drufford—a romantic picture of a proud and independent creature imprisoned, of a bird fast shut in a muffled cage. When I came to Windrush she had seemed content, and in her contentment to have lost those qualities that had for me distinguished her among women. She had been proud, but with a possessive pride; she had been independent, but with an independence, not personal, but belonging to her station in life. She had been beautiful, but with an alien beauty of which the power had frightened me. Now I looked at her anew, and a trembling of delight ran over me like the breath of a wind—such a trembling, my memory cried suddenly, as I had known in the first days at Lisson at the beginning of the world. Yet not the same, I said, turning away and pressing the lids over my eyes until a fiery redness swung before me, not the same, for then she also was at the beginning of the world, whither she and I can never again return.

But my eyes were opened to her now, and, even while my brush was in my hand, my thought would struggle towards her. I became in her presence, not aloof as I had been, but timid, feeling that if she could read my mind, could

guess how childishly I would pretend that we had run away in the night together and that our present existence was but a dream, she would smile and play with her smiling, and I be swallowed up in shame. I remembered, even, that it was to my brother's friend that she was married, and knew that Richard, though he loved me, would laugh, too, at my folly and be unable to consider it as anything but a boy's fantastication of life. Sometimes I would force myself to look into Windrush with Richard's eyes and would hear him say very calmly that Clare was amusing herself and that I was behaving like a fool. It did not then enter my mind that Clare's attitude towards me had changed. I saw in her sometimes the old gentleness, sometimes the new pride, always that strange, half-sad gaiety which had baffled my attempted portraiture of her; but of more than this I was unaware, perhaps because she herself was as yet scarcely aware of it, perhaps because, beneath all my turbulence and passion, I was, in my estimate of others, deeply my father's child. It has always surprised me, and surprises me still, that, in the full tide of affairs in a crowded, assertive, thrusting world, any woman should turn aside long enough to discover in me what may be loved. And I had had proof at Lisson that Clare did not love me. I did not guess that she was transformed.

She did not go to London, and Ned in my presence said no more of it, except to ask once more whether, if Clare was to spend all the summer

at Windrush, I would not paint her portrait. We were at tea out of doors, and Miss Fullaton, with a cup tightly clasped between her hands, was nodding in the shade.

"And pray, Ned," she asked suddenly, "why are you so firm that this portrait is to be painted? Answer me that. Then, perhaps, you, Sir, will tell me why you refuse."

"Naturally, I wish it," Ned answered.

"That is no answer. Because you think it will be valuable?"

"No, Great-Aunt. I am not buying to sell."

She twitched her lips at that convincing answer. "But still you have not given your reason."

"Naturally, I want a portrait of her," Ned replied.

"Oh naturally," said she, and squared her shoulders away from him towards me. "And you, Sir? You have never answered me. You will paint me, but not her?"

"I tried at Lisson and never finished."

"You could try again."

"When I'm older, I could."

"But she will be older, too, will she not? . . . Ah! Had you forgotten that? Had you forgotten that she will grow old?"

"Had you forgotten?" Clare asked me later in the evening as we walked together towards the lake.

I did not mistake her question and found it easy to answer, yes, I had never thought of her as growing old; perhaps because my drawings of her had given her a kind of fixity in my mind and I had attempted to discover in them all that she was or would become.

"That is asking much of a portrait?"

"Every great portrait is a portrait of a whole life."

"And you failed—why? Because you were attempting too much?"

"Because I could not fully recognize what I saw."

She asked me if this did not mean that I was striving to bring to a portrait the knowledge and understanding which could belong only to God. But so I understood portraiture, I said, and, indeed, all art, whether painting or writing or music, for otherwise it became photography or decoration or pattern-making, or a mixture of the three. "But most schools of painting," she said, "tend in one of those three directions. Isn't that, roughly, the battle between them from the beginning of time?" And when I rashly answered that a determination to attempt the vision of God—of their several Gods—was what linked together the great masters of all schools and distinguished them from those who were but craftsmen, she said, with a glance of smiling penetration:

"I feel always, Nigel, that you think of me very little as I am. When you were drawing me you used to look at me as if I held some key to your

life that you were struggling to find—to your own life far more than to mine. And now you say that you have never thought of me as growing old. Have you ever thought of me as hungry or thirsty or lonely or tired?"

"I thought of you imprisoned," I said, "and found that you were not."

"Imprisoned?"

"In your life here."

"And you found that I was not," she repeated, turning her head away from me. Then she added suddenly: "That evening when I came to you in the church—that made a difference, Nigel? You saw me differently then, and since?"

"Yes."

"And you have forgiven me?" she asked, looking into my face. "I want you to forgive me. Not to remember that I failed you." After a pause, she said slowly: "That is all I want. . . . No, it isn't all. I want you to go beyond me, far beyond. Then, when you are old and the world is at your feet, I want you to look back and remember——"

"I shall remember," I said, "the portrait I could not paint."

She laughed at that and we went forward with a quicker pace until, passing through the graveyard, we entered the church and stood together by the Fullaton tomb.

"What did I do," she asked, "that made you cease to be a stranger to me?"

But I could not tell her what she did, for it would have been clumsy, and perhaps meaningless to her, to have said that Clare Sibright and Clare Fullaton were different spirits, and that, when she found me in the church, the first of these had seemed to return to earth.

"I should like," she said presently, "to watch you when you are painting."

"Here?"

"And sometimes in the country, too. Are you painting in the church to-morrow?"

I said that I should be in the church for the early light of the afternoon, and she answered that she would come and sit beside me, for she wished to see how I worked.

"But shall I be able to work at all," I wondered, "if she is near me?"

It happened next day that I did not go to the church. Henry Fullaton and I, having eaten a midday meal in the studio, continued the work in which, during the morning, we had become absorbed. Once, while we rested, he spoke of Clare, saying that he wished she had agreed to go to London. The change would have done her good. "Windrush is too quiet a place for a young girl when only we ourselves are at home." But that I had made any promise to meet her that day did not enter my mind.

I came down early to dinner and found her

alone in the drawing-room. She looked a question at me, but I did not know what question she asked. For two hours, she said, she had waited for me in Windrush church.

"For two hours?" I said stupidly.

"I thought that you would be certain to come."

I said what I could, explained that I had not thought of the engagement as final between us, and expected that she would laugh away my fault and so pardon it. But she did not laugh it away, and, though she said little more of it and began to ask me of the work that had detained me, I saw that she was wounded and angry. The evening passed as evenings did at Windrush—with a lonely formality that cried out for guests. When Clare went early to bed, I followed her into the hall and lighted her candle for her. Had she forgiven me? I asked, and would she prove her forgiveness by coming to the church or on to Thrusted with me to-morrow? "Yes," she said, and laughed at her own anger and warmly held out her hand. But as I looked up at her so that her candle-lit beauty might remain with me when she was gone, the candle itself shook, her lip trembled, and her eyes filled with tears, slowly and after a battle, like the eyes of a courageous child.

"Clare!" I said, not even then understanding in what way I had hurt her.

She made no vain and hasty attempt to conceal her emotion, but turned gently from me and,

with quiet words that she found not easy to speak, took her way upstairs.

That night on some pretext I drew Henry Fullaton into the studio before we went to bed and urged him to talk to me of the Flemish painters in the early days of the seventeenth century, a subject upon which he had been launched before dinner. But so disturbed was my mind that I found it hard to listen quietly to his discourse and continually interrupted it, at first with questions relevant enough, but presently with a rash outpouring of my own thought upon the moral ideas of the seventeenth century and of their visible influence upon painters of the time. "What has come to you, Nigel?" he said at last. "I like your talk, but, upon my soul, it's the talk of a madman. One might think that these old controversies of doctrine and ritual were alive for you to-day, you speak of them so passionately." But I paid no heed to him. I did not want our conversation to cease, and plied him with more questions and challenges to opinion, for if we could stay here talking until near morning, I thought, my brain would weary of its excitement and, when I lay down, I should sleep. He, however, was an old man and would not be detained. Soon after midnight he left me alone and went yawning down the passage, shaking his head over my follies.

I took out the drawings I had made of Clare and laid them on the floor with a lamp beside them

so that I might lie at full length and contemplate their riddle. She loved me, my heart said, and, because my eyes were bent upon the old drawings, it seemed that I was making this discovery in the nursery at Lisson, and that there had been no such miracle before in the world. It seemed that I was sitting again in the window-seat, hearing the foliage rustle into silence and the last raindrop fall from the eaves. I knew that, because she loved me and I felt her love about me like a cloak, I might go henceforward upon earth as a child without fear, and that even in pain there would be detachment from pain as if within my earthly being there were another being made by her love inviolate. To be loved is to be made familiar with the spirits of natural things, so that what was once a dead or impersonal beauty—a tree, a river, a hill, to be observed, admired, and forgotten—becomes a part of life beyond forgetting. We seem to have been born but in the moment of our discovery of love, and to be running out anew from the arms of God, a part of his first creation. We are young as we were not even in our childhood; we are old as we shall not be in the age of the body when we falter to the grave—young and old, perhaps, as God is, for is it not into his face that we have looked, and is it not his timeless passion that has flamed within us? "But who is she and who am I," I thought, "that in our mutual love I should see the origin of love and a beginning of the

world?" Yet I could not then think otherwise. Mercy was upon me and wonder; imagination consumed me like a fire.

"But I have been dreaming of the past," I said, seeing the drawings again, "and of a woman that is no more. She did not love me then, though she was compassionate and my head lay upon her breast. The chance is gone. What was first cannot be first again; she and I can never go out together to a beginning of the world. She who loves me now is not she whose love might have been held within the peace of God. Though she have the same form and speech, and though the ghost be in her movements so that sometimes I cry: 'It is she,' yet it is not she, and I am not he to whom creation seemed newly given. Though I should lie with her and possess her, I should possess nothing. There is nothing but kisses on her lips."

I rose from the floor, put the drawings away, and went to my own room. Through the night, as I lay awake, my desire was in argument with my soul, and, though I knew the identification to be false, I found it hard to remember that Clare Sibright and Clare Fullaton were not the same woman, so closely were they linked by the accident of beauty shared. Falling away towards dream, I would see Clare as I had last seen her with candle in hand, but now, though her eyes were bright, not tears but passion lighted them. She beckoned to me and I followed her, saying to myself coldly amid sensual heat: "It is the same

body. It is the same body. I shall have satisfaction and peace." But suddenly she turned her face towards me, and I saw, from the same features, another Clare look out, the Clare whom I had known at Lisson in the beginning of the world. "You are following another girl," she seemed to say, "who to all the world is the same with myself, but to you only she is not the same and cannot be. Yet you follow her for the body, deceiving yourself that you may thus satisfy the desire of your soul." When she had spoken I found myself staring at the ceiling of my room at Windrush, and observing how the first of daylight threw on the plaster a grey shadow of the window-frame. I could hear the twittering of birds.

Then I began greedily to ask myself, knowing the answer, whether I had mistaken the signs, and whether my power over Ned Fullaton's wife was indeed what it appeared to be. The answers flattered my senses, which sleeplessness and fitful dreams had left uncontrolled, and I thought: "She is proud, but nakedness will humble her and her hair be fallen about her face." And I thought again: "She is weary and has turned her face from me. Her hair falls away from her neck." . . . I stirred, and heard again clearly the twittering in the trees. . . . But was she not the woman I had loved and worshipped? Had she not the same lineaments; did she not speak with the same voice? How, if this were so, had I, even on the edge of dreaming, coveted her flesh with a

covetousness so angry? There seemed no honour and beauty in life, but only emptiness or a shameful mockery of fulfilment. Then let there be emptiness, I cried. I will go from her and, while I paint, I will forget all but my painting.

I ran to the window and leaned out and began to feel that all I had experienced of debasement and exaltation was no more than a dream's confusion of which I should take no account. And I knew that I should not yet go from Windrush, for Clare's eyes had been full of tears when she said good night to me, and I wished to see how she would laugh in the morning, and to hear her speak again when we walked, as was now our frequent custom, across the meadows in the direction of the woods.

Though all else was checked in its course, my portrait of Miss Fullaton moved steadily towards completion. Henry Fullaton rejoiced in it, for he hated to be a harsh critic, and no other work of mine could he then praise without misgiving. No other work of mine could he understand, for he did not know the deep confusion and high excitements of my mind. He guessed at an inward struggle, but, because his faith was that the brush performs what hand and eye command, would not accept it as a basis of the change in my canvases. He was too reasonable a man to permit himself to believe in unreason. He braced himself, therefore,

for unwilling attack, and said that I was no longer taking trouble. "You are painting like a mixture between a fool and an inspired demon. Why do you want to go at it like that, boy? The pace can't last."

I replied dully that I was painting more slowly than usual.

"Slowly? So much the worse. It's not the clock I'm complaining of. But your mind is moving faster than your brush"—he waved his hand—"here, there, and everywhere."

So helpless did I feel before his vague kindliness, and so powerless to give him the explanation which he seemed almost with diffidence to invite, that I could only turn and gaze at him with eyes that must have held something of the truth in them, for he looked suddenly sorrowful and embarrassed as if he had seen in part what he did not wish to see. In spite of his smoother manner, his easier habit of speech; in spite of his different air of warmth and good-fellowship—how like my own father he was! How readily, between him and me, there sprang up the same barriers which had stood across the half-spoken confidences of my childhood.

"You see," he said with an air of mystery (and I remembered how my father would ride away from awkwardness by suddenly revealing that there were chocolates in a locked drawer and mockingly jingling his keys), "you see, I had a little surprise in pickle for you. Jules Coutisson

is coming over from Paris on other business, and I have asked him here. Not to see my pictures, though."

The name of Coutisson was familiar: there was not in Europe a greater dealer and connoisseur. Coutisson—but Jules Coutisson?

"Pierre Coutisson's son," said Henry Fullaton with the air of one producing at least the knave of trumps. "Of course there's work enough of yours to show him, and first-rate it is, too, or you may be sure I shouldn't have brought him here. But he will want to see what you are doing now. I should have liked him to have watched you at work."

"There's Windrush church," I said.

"But you've dropped it. You haven't touched it for—well, not for days."

"Miss Fullaton's portrait, then?"

Henry Fullaton, considering the subject, blew into his beard. "Oddly enough, I don't believe that will interest Jules. That's where he falls short of Pierre. As broad a knowledge and as broad a mind as you please about the masters—though for some queer reason he's only half alive to Gainsborough landscape; but with present-day men he's a critic who runs a bit too strictly on rails—broad rails, you understand, and many of 'em—but still, rails. And I don't think my aunt, as you have done her, is in his line of country. He won't like the panel and the extreme delicacy of the brush-work. Besides, beautiful though it is,

my boy, it's not fully representative of you. Now his father *would* have seen what's in it and just how far it does represent you." Henry Fullaton was, in imagination, joyfully producing the ace of trumps. "Pierre Coutisson would have seen what's in it," he repeated.

I understood that Jules Coutisson was being brought to Windrush for my benefit, and that, with so important a visitor at hand, Mr. Fullaton was troubled for my present work.

"Look here," he said suddenly, "don't stand on ceremony, Nigel. Are you getting tired of Windrush? Would you like a break? Go away and come back when you feel like it."

Perhaps he would have been glad if I had said "yes." If I had been out of the house when Jules Coutisson arrived, my old work would have been enough; nothing need have been said of the new; Henry Fullaton might have exercised an unfettered discretion. But I did not then perceive this subtlety, if subtlety it was, and replied, with a vague explanation of my mood, that I would rather stay at Windrush if he was not tired of my being in his studio.

"Tired?" he said. "My dear fellow, it's an old man's joy in life to have you here."

Clare, too, hearing that my going away for a holiday had been discussed, frankly opposed it.

"You can't go," she said, "until after Monsieur Coutisson has been here."

"You'd be a fool to go," said Ned, knowing for

once that he was making a joke at his own expense, "until the cricket week is over. It's deuced good fun, I can tell you."

She laughed at him and he was pleased by her laughter.

"Look here," he said, encouraged. "Couldn't you do a kind of portrait sketch of the teams?"

"Twenty-two portraits?"

"Oh, in a group, I mean."

"That doesn't help much," I said.

"No, I suppose not," he answered, seeing out of the corner of an eye that Clare was now smiling at him. "Just rough sketches, I meant, you know."

"Better than a photograph, eh, Ned?" said Henry Fullaton, and dug his son affectionately in the ribs.

The frankness with which Clare had at once said, "You can't go, Nigel," had a baffling charm. There was in it no suggestion of concealed intent. She spoke with sincerity, as a friend who enjoyed her friend's company; but there was no hint of emotion in her voice, and, while she spoke, none, I suspect, in her mind. She was too much an Englishwoman to allow personal emotion to influence her tone when more than one other was present; certainly she was too well controlled, by training and instinct, to let it affect her conduct of an English country-house. Yet there was neither hardness nor artificiality in her manner—only the natural frankness in which she had at once taken refuge after the indiscretion of an

evening. "Nigel, I'm sorry," she had said in the morning. "I was tired yesterday. I made a fool of myself about your not being at the church," and the little shyness, the doubting tenderness, which had been in her eyes when she began to speak, had vanished, and before the world we knew again how to be at ease. But in secret there was no ease for me or for her. She did not again come to the Fullaton angel, and I, who dared not ask her to come, knowing that she would consent, could not work in the place alone. When I went out to paint the countryside, she would say in the presence of others: "Nigel, would it bother you if I came to watch you later in the morning?" but, if she came, I would be forced soon to lay down my brush and would look up into a white face. And in the evening, if Ned and his father went from the room and Miss Fullaton was silent in her chair, I, reading a book, would know when Clare's eyes were raised to me and when they were turned away.

"I think I shall go to my room," Miss Fullaton would say, but we would delay her until Ned returned.

"Now," she said, "perhaps you will ring for my woman," and, when my fingers were on the handle of the bell: "Twice—very clearly. She's old, but she's still a fool."

By this and a thousand indications of word and manner it was made clear to me that Miss Fullaton was aware of my work's disturbance. One afternoon, while I was painting her, she said abruptly:

"So you are not going from Windrush?"

"Going? No," I answered, absorbed in my work and so off my guard.

"Henry spoke of a holiday."

I shook my head and silence again fell between us. She waited until I had said that I would work no more that day.

"When will my portrait be done?" she asked.

"Soon now, I hope."

"You can work on that. It's odd that you can work on nothing else."

"I am painting most of the day."

"But not thinking of it—not as you did when first you came here? Isn't that true? My old eyes don't judge a painting nowadays, but they see the painter, and my ears can hear what is said. Come, is it the truth? Henry says you are going to pieces. It's as well you should know."

"Did he say that?"

"Not in those words . . . I say it for him. Is it true?"

"I hope not," I answered. "No one can paint consistently at one level for many months."

She leaned back and a shadow of weariness passed over her face. She seemed to be considering whether she should continue this conversation or let me go. For a moment she did indeed close her eyes and I moved towards the door, but in an instant she bestirred herself and said:

"I am very old, Mr. Frew. Why do you trouble to lie to me? Be assured, I am not your enemy.

Nor is it any matter to me whether you waste your life. There is, however, one question. You may answer me or not, as you please. But put the question to vourself and answer yourself. Shall you ever, as things are, be able to work at Windrush again? Is there no knot to cut?"

I said then that I had had it in my mind to go from Windrush.

"And return?" said she.

"And not return."

A little ejaculation of hard breath escaped her. "Where shall you go?" she asked, to which I answered that Paris had been much in my thoughts, but vaguely, for I knew no one there, and——

"And?" she demanded. "What stays you?"

I said that it was not so easy as she supposed. I was Mr. Fullaton's pupil; I owed much to him; I felt myself bound by an allegiance.

"For ever?"

Not for ever, but I had been here a few months only. In any case I could not, I knew, without wounding him, leave upon an impulse. My father, moreover, had unwillingly let me come to Windrush and had made already great concessions—how great none but I knew—of his own opinion.

"He would hate your going to Paris?"

"He would hate my going from here, he would hate Paris, above all he would hate a change of plan for no reason."

"For no reason!" she exclaimed.

"But I have written to him," I said quickly, "telling him——"

"Not the truth, I'll warrant. . . . Come, Sir, it makes me tired to see you standing there. Bring a chair. And remember, I beg you, that you are an artist and a man—though a young one—and have your own life to live. Neither your father nor my nephew Henry can live it for you. Why are you tormenting yourself? Has no one before you wanted his neighbour's wife? These twists of conscience are foolery to me. Take her or leave her and be done. If you cannot leave her, let Ned be the fool, not you."

So far you have seen, I thought.

"Pierre was a fool when he was young," she broke in when I had begun to answer. "It would have been odd if after all he had come here instead of his son. We should have laughed together—he and I. How we should have laughed! It would have been good—for the last time. I asked him to come—it is of Pierre Coutisson I'm speaking—I dare say as much for my own sake as for yours. He is younger than I am by more than ten years, but ten years——" Her eyes shifted beneath their film and she saw me again. "It is amusing to think," she said, "that there's any creature so young as you upon earth."

There was, I found, an irresistible fascination in her stare. Never before had I been so close to her for so long. I could distinguish the grains of powder on her jaws and soft white hairs thrusting

their way through them. Her stare, which remained fixed upon me, so that I knew not what she saw of memory and what of actual presence, was impersonal and penetrating—so impersonal that there seemed now to have been no inquisition even in the brutality of her speech. Was she not already a being in another world, chained by her experience in this?

"Paris," she said, perhaps still in advice to me, perhaps as an echo of some ancient thought that had broken in upon her weariness.

I rang for the maid and awaited her coming, not wishing to leave Miss Fullaton alone. "So it is to her that I owe Mr. Fullaton's little 'surprise,' " I thought. She had dealt him his trumps.

The door opened and the maid entered. At the sound, Miss Fullaton turned her head.

"Tell me, Sir, what have you done with my little cousin's crown?" Then, with swift afterthought, she added to her maid: "Robinson, look at my portrait. It is nearly finished; Mr. Frew will show it to you now. Tell me, should I like it if I could see?"

The woman stood before the panel, one hand clasping a thick forearm that was laid across her bosom. She advanced, retreated, cocked her head.

"There now!" she said, shooting at me a glance of suspicion and defiance. "Well, ma'am, I was always one to speak my mind."

"Always," said Miss Fullaton.

"It's wonderful like you, ma'am, that I will say

—wonderful like. Why, when I look back and remember you as you was more'n twenty years ago—there you are waitin' for me, ma'am, and when I looks at you now, ma'am, there again—why, it's as if you'd been sittin' there always, in a manner of speaking, and always would."

"But you don't like it," I said.

"I wouldn't say that, Sir. I was always one to know a good picture, from being in the best houses. But it don't come to me not as comfortable, Sir, not having the mistress looking out like that and waiting——"

"Like a spider," said Miss Fullaton.

"But the diamonds now," the maid continued, afraid that she had hurt me, "these diamonds is lovely. Such little bits of paint, too, when you come to look into them. . . . I dare say you'll be painting Mrs. Ned, Sir, now this is done?"

Ned was troubled by continual postponements of M. Jules Coutisson's arrival.

"When is this Frenchman coming?" he demanded. "Why should we allow him to put it off and put it off just as suits him, as if the house were a hotel."

"Because we want him here," said Henry Fullaton briefly. "We must let him choose his own time. Hereford isn't within a stone's-throw of Paris, remember, and he is a busy man."

"Well," Ned remarked, "if he turns up in

cricket week, upon his own head be it. He won't like it. There'll not be a man in the place, except you and Nigel, that knows a picture from the side of a house."

"But there will be ladies," said his father. "He will pardon their ignorance. The French are extremely courteous."

"Courteous! He's that kind is he?"

Ever since his project of going to London was abandoned, Ned had audibly consoled himself with meditations on cricket. Even while the project was being discussed, he had pointed out to Clare how genuine was his sacrifice in suggesting that they should go, for he would thus lose much practice early in the season. Condemned to stay at home, he had at once begun to take his bats from their corners and was to be seen in one of the gardener's sheds wiping them and estimating their oiliness. "That," he said one morning at breakfast, seeing a small parcel among the letters on a side-table, "must be my new cap. I sent to Oxford for it." A tearing of brown paper and a snapping string revealed concentric circles, green and pink, with a green button in their midst.

"I thought the button on the old cap was pink," Clare said.

"No, my dear." He was amused by the stupendous ignorance of women. "Green—ever since the college was founded."

"Somewhere in the fifteenth century, I believe?" his father inquired.

Ned tried on the cap and asked for approval of it. In the course of the same morning he tried on brown cricket shoes. He inspected eight shirts and eight pairs of trousers, showing his wife how successfully moth had, during the winter, been kept from them. A tie of pink and green and a broad waistband of the same colours, ingeniously folded so that one corner drooped in the form of a triangular tail, completed his equipment—completed it except when the presence of village bowlers, or perhaps of George Currall, required short pads of cane and brown leather to be strapped to the batsman's legs. And sometimes when Windrush village made war on Thrusted, or on some rival farther afield, a mounted groom brought Ned's mare into the courtyard and he rode forth like a knight to battle, with an esquire bearing his weapons.

Thus had he prepared for his own cricket-week, which, since his Oxford days, had been an annual event at Windrush. Two matches were played in the upper meadow—the first on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons between eleven Hornets, touring in vacation from Ned's old college, and "Mr. Edward Fullaton's XV"; the second, and this a more serious tussle, on Friday and Saturday, between the Hornets and Mr. Edward Fullaton's XI. In the surrounding villages Mr. Edward Fullaton's XV, known as the Mouldies, was greatly ridiculed and loved. Young grooms from more than one country-house found a place in it;

the smith of Thrusted was its fast bowler; the general provider of Windrush peered through spectacles over the bails.

"One is never sure," Ned explained, "that the Mouldies will last two afternoons."

"Then why not make it a one-day match?" I asked.

He grinned. "Oh, that would never do. You don't know Herefordshire, Nigel. First, the Mouldies would be insulted. Then what of the two teas, two suppers, and two dances for them and all their families and most of their friends? You forget that I'm to be a candidate for Parliament. Besides, they're damn good fellows," he added, and I knew that he thought more of this than of his candidature.

The second match was of greater importance, and Ned was to be seen, long before the event, sucking a gold pencil in the drawing-room after dinner and choosing Mr. Edward Fullaton's XI. On this occasion the grooms would be in the audience, lying on the grass in that part of the upper meadow set apart for the people, and their young masters—such of them at least as Ned invited—would be at the wickets. The County, particularly on Saturday afternoon, would drive in from far and wide; there would be bunting among the trees; the Windrush and Thrusted Band would play selections.

"Would it be possible this year to omit the band?" Henry Fullaton asked.

"But why?" said Ned with loyal indignation. "Aren't they good enough?"

"Oh yes," his father hastily replied. "I thought it was rather hot for them—particularly as they have to play again at night."

"Well," Ned answered, "that's their look out. It's chiefly for this they practise all the year."

"What would happen, Ned, if—for the dance on the Saturday night, I mean—you had an orchestra down from London?" Clare suggested.

"You can't do that kind of thing, my dear."

"People do."

"'Pends on the people—and the place. You must allow me to know best about Windrush, Clare."

"Oh," she said, "I do."

The cricket week was, in short, as Henry Fullaton said, "Ned's Canterbury." The house would be full of Hornets and as many of their sisters and younger feminine cousins as could be accommodated; if the crowding became too great the Hornets themselves would overflow to the Curralls', to rooms above the blacksmith's shop, and even to the "Plough and Fiddle," though the lessee of that inn was, strangely, a radical and no cricketer. At no other time of the year was the Manor so full of noise or Ned so glad that some day he would own it. Little wonder that he regarded the possibility of M. Jules Coutisson's arrival in the midst of these festivities with annoyance and misgiving. M. Coutisson, he felt, would

not like the Windrush and Thrusted Band. He could not, moreover, be sent to the "Plough and Fiddle," and would probably occupy a room large enough to give space to four Hornets.

"Any news, Father? When is this fellow of yours going to turn up?" Ned demanded. "If he would come now, he could be out of the house again before Canterbury."

He came in time to set Ned's fears at rest; came, moreover, busily announcing his imminent departure.

"I have brought little baggage, dear lady. Mine is but, as you say, a flying visit."

A short, portly man with thinning hair brushed tightly away from his temples, with a loose, opaque, sallow skin and a grizzled beard cut close and square, he seemed never before to have left a town, and to regret his present adventure. To Clare he was elaborately polite, to Ned silent, to Henry Fullaton deferential with a marvellously contemptuous deference, and by Miss Fullaton inordinately interested. Whenever she was present, he would drift out of conversation and allow his eyes, which were like black beads floating in a yellowish bath, to become fixed on her; it was as if he had discovered some astonishing animal that he did not believe to be woman. She returned his gaze with amusement and gave him her hand to kiss.

"So you are Pierre's son, Monsieur. It is a miracle."

"Comme qui dirait, Madame, la naissance de Notre Seigneur."

She looked at him shrewdly, delighted by the retort. "To-morrow morning you will come to my room and talk? I think we shall enjoy it. I have much to ask of your father."

"And I," said he, "bring the warmest messages from him."

Towards me he behaved with a kind of reserved brotherliness, now patting me on the arm in a reassuring manner, now looking at me across the room with quizzical resentment. "What was my father driving at?" he seemed to be asking himself. "Why did he insist on my making this uncomfortable journey? Is it possible that the young man is genuinely a master . . . in any case, what evidence can my father have had of it? Or am I come on an errand of vicarious sentiment? Is the report required of me, not on the boy's painting, but on this remarkable ruin of an old lady who seems to have made a pretty fool of my father when he was of an age with the boy?" And the black beads would float across their yellowish fluid until his gaze had passed from me to Miss Fullaton once more.

It was never openly said that his purpose in coming to Windrush was to see my work, and he was, therefore, under no obligation to comment upon it to me. On the morning after his arrival I was dismissed from the house; he went to the studio and to Miss Fullaton's room in my

absence; after luncheon, he drank black coffee, smoked cigars, and told us—I know not by what chance—droll stories of M. Thiers; by evening he was gone. Before he went, while he was standing in the hall with a travelling rug over his arm, he and I found ourselves alone together for the first time. He looked at me apprehensively, pulled out his watch, and said that he hoped he would not have long to wait at the railway station. Did I not think railway stations abominable? In winter they blew one away; in summer they were dusty, and he found always, for his part, that they gave him hay-fever. Was I not of opinion——

"Monsieur," I said desperately and against my own will, "did you see my work this morning?"

"What abruptness!" his eyes answered, as if he were a grave dog to whom some terrier had made a snapping advance. "The young English are without manners!" But he passed a pale tongue over grey lips and smiled with his teeth.

"Yes, I saw them with great pleasure. Some are remarkable—altogether remarkable." This, he seemed to have decided, was to be his escape and I was in no mood to pursue him. He pulled out his watch again and dangled it from his forefinger. Then to my astonishment the waxen figure came suddenly to life. He came close to me, his watch gripped in his fist.

"I will tell you," he said. "Your work has

two qualities. You have a deeper knowledge of paint and draughtsmanship than comes from the schools. In so young a man, your technical powers are altogether remarkable. You draw like an angel. That is the first quality. Where might it not carry you if you would say what the world is now saying, if you would paint in the idiom of your own age? But you have another quality which makes me despair. It is the quality which I tell to my father speaks to the souls of peasants after a picture has hung upon a wall three hundred years." He flung out both his clenched hands, allowing his watch to swing wildly on its chain. "But what is that to us to-day? We are not painting for the souls of peasants, but for the eyes of cultivated men. Soon, it may be, there will be no more peasants in the world. We have progressed beyond all that. We must no longer look in that direction for an inspiration of art, but to an intellectualism so superb, so regulated, so critically adjusted, yet so free, that it gives always the impression of free decorative impulse. It is brilliant, says my father, but it is barren. Barren! is my reply, but the world now knows itself to be barren, and, like a woman in that condition, has only to decorate itself beautifully but in vain. . . . Your work, Sir, has energy and brilliance. I shall tell my father of it —oh yes, I shall tell him. But the painters of the future will not think as you think. Be assured of that. They will be neither believers nor sceptics; they will not notice the presence or absence of a

god in the world. They will not be interested; in short, you belong to another age."

After he had spoken and while I was looking at him and wondering whether all the praise that had been given me was not the praise of friends; while I was bitterly telling myself: "This man is just and impartial, and what he has been so elaborately saying is that I am an imitator," I saw his face change. A smile of self-criticism passed over it.

"My father," he said, "might be of an opinion different from mine."

"That is his way of consoling me," I thought; "he is sorry to have wounded me." But he continued in a quiet voice, as if the imagining of his father had caused him to argue nervously with himself:

"I have said that you belong to another age. Perhaps it is not after all an age of the past, but an age that lies farther in the future than I can see. I do not think so. One can but judge by one's own taste and one's own intuition. I do not like your work; it says nothing to me that I wish to hear; but there is that in it which may cause the future to mock at me. I may be more profoundly wrong than ever I have been. In your work there lies that possibility. But I do not think so. I do not think so. And, when all is said, my friend, we can but judge by our own intuition."

I had not enough experience of men, perhaps not enough arrogance, to perceive that, while he

spoke to me, Jules Coutisson had begun to doubt his own judgment and to dread the moment, if ever it should come, when his father—his god with whom he was eternally at war—should see my work. I saw nothing but darkness in his words; all but his hostility seemed a sop casually thrown out. I found suddenly that I had set great store by his decision. If it had been favourable, it would have put in my hands the argument by which my father might have been persuaded to liberate me from Windrush. They would have told him that the name of Coutisson was a name of magic, that it opened all doors in Paris, that it had a solid, a classical pre-eminence. Jules Coutisson would have said: "Come with me to Paris and your fortune is made," and my father, who would yield always to advice of high credit, would not have stood in the way of my fortune. For Henry Fullaton he had let me come to Windrush; for Jules Coutisson, when Jules Coutisson had been explained to him, he would, with judicial reluctance, have let me leave it.

Now, when Coutisson was gone, I began to read doubt in every face. Had they ever believed in me? Should I ever be able to prove myself? "Well, Sir," I found myself asking Mr. Fullaton, "what was the verdict?"

"Oh," said he, "you must pay no attention to Jules Coutisson. He hated being sent here. From the first he was out of humour. And, after all, who is he?—no one but his father's son."

I pressed still for the verdict and listened in agony to Henry Fullaton's polite softening of it. Only Miss Fullaton made me smile by her violence. She had been disappointed in Pierre Coutisson's ambassador.

"The man is a conceited fool," she said. "I wish I could live long enough to see you prove it. You know, Sir, where that proof must be made—in Paris, nowhere else."

"Paris!" I answered. "Now?"

"We shall do no more work this week," said Henry Fullaton, when the Hornets had begun to make themselves heard throughout the house, "not in this studio at any rate. I have to give it over to them. You had better make a study of the remoter landscapes, Nigel, if you want peace."

No more work? I thought, who had been counting on the studio as a place of retreat. I had begun to feel that I was either much older or much younger than Ned's guests; I was shy and awkward among them. Already several ladies had arrived, and Lord Singstree had come from Singstree with Pug Trobey.

"My—ah—sister Agatha sends her regards," said Pug. "I have partic'lar instructions to see what you're paintin' now. You'll show me, some mornin' before I go? Remind me, will you, there's a good fellow. Agatha's a bit of an invalid now,

you know. Doesn't do to disappoint her. You won't let me forget?"

There were girls who looked at me curiously and said: "Staying here all the summer, you'll have had a lot of practice at the wickets, Mr. Frew?" and when I replied that most of my time was spent in painting, they said: "Oh, really! How interesting!" and knew not what else to say. None of them was at all interested in cricket, but they never ceased, when men were present, to ask questions about it. Singstree, in particular, loved to instruct them. He would even put a bat into their hands, which they held as if it were a giant willow-tree with roots still fast in the ground, and show them, amid an abundance of laughter from pupil and spectator alike, how to play forward and keep the left elbow up. "You see," he said, "it all depends on your reach, Miss Etta. I can play forward almost the length of that rug." Miss Etta and her companions, though they discreetly measured their forward play, not in rug lengths, but in pieces of pattern, would try to imitate him, until, as Singstree perhaps intended, their lesson became an elegant rivalry of ankles. One might have fallen if his arms had not deftly recovered her. She played her forward stroke, she swayed, she confidently toppled. "Oh! Lord Singstree!"

"A boundary," he replied gallantly. "A clinking boundary straight through the covers."

In the more active studio games Pug Trobey

took no part, for he did not wish to disturb his clothes. Until the Hornets and the main body of their ladies arrived, his withdrawal on all occasions that threatened riot was, indeed, a little conspicuous, and Miss Etta was inclined to think him a prig; but the Hornets, by their numbers and *élan*, covered his retreat, and he was presently able to establish himself very comfortably among cushions as an arbiter of taste. "You know," he remarked to Ned, surveying the Hornets, "some of these young men are extremely odd. When we were up, those socks. . . . Next Canterbury, you must issue a sumptuary decree." On Thursday, when Mr. Edward Fullaton's XV was hopefully and in a failing light attacking the Hornets in the last innings of the match, Pug was called upon to appear in the deep field as a substitute for the postman, who had hurt his finger. He came out at once, exquisitely equipped, as if he had throughout the day been awaiting this serious call. The ladies, who had grown weary of the postman's broad back, had opportunity to observe the whiteness of Pug's shirt, the even arrangement of his pink and green waistband, the smooth drapery of his trousers, and the chestnut gleam of his hair when he removed his cap and tossed it between overs at an intrusive sparrow. But they remarked with disapproval that he fielded with his fingertips in his pockets. They knew that cricketers should be ardent, alert.

"Really, isn't that a little lazy?"

"Oh, well, my dear, what do you expect? Mr. Trobey is always so extremely la-di-da."

"I sometimes feel," said the first lady with the venom of intolerant youth, "that I should like to send him to join my brother's regiment in India. They make men of them there."

"And yet he played for Oxford," the other replied. "I should like to shake him. If a ball came, I suppose he would just wave at it."

The ball rose as she spoke.

"Well hit, Sir! Oh, well hit!" the Hornets cried.

The ball soared. The sun gilded it. The swallows observed it.

"Look, the lazy thing. He's not begun to move."

The ball reached its zenith, vanished in a glittering haze, emerged, descended, became a cannon-shot.

"Oh!" cried the lady whose hero was on the frontier of Afghanistan, and jumped vainly from her chair.

Pug Trobey's fingers were no longer in his pockets. He was watching the enemy and tripping backwards like a teacher at a dancing-class. When the ladies opened their eyes again, they saw him rolling the ball along the ground in the direction of the wicket-keeper, who was sturdily clapping his gloves.

"Oh, well *caught*, Sir!" cried the Hornets, though their ninth wicket had fallen.

"Cool as a cucumber!"

"Perfect timing," a judicial voice added.

"And he made it look so awfully easy," said the ladies, who, after all, were appreciators of style. How *did* he do it? they asked him when the tenth wicket was down and Mr. Edward Fullaton's triumphant XV were hurrying away to prepare for supper and a dance.

"Oh, one puts up one's hands, you know," he replied, "and tries not to lose one's head. The rest is with Providence."

They kept dances for him that evening, and were glad in his company to revisit the scene of his triumph, for the paths to the upper meadow were decorated with fairy lights and paper lanterns. One of these flared now and then and was stamped out on the lawn. Not a leaf stirred; the visitors from Windrush, being clothed otherwise than the ladies of quality, hotly shone. "They'd be happier in their shifts," said Miss Fullaton, looking down from the gallery, where she had commanded my presence, upon a throng of red arms, protruding bustles, and square coat-tails festively revolving. The Hornets' sisters, being of the fortunate class that strips to dance, appeared to be islands of coolness, but sometimes they raised their faces to us. "In my day, Sir," said Miss Fullaton, "the trouble was often to keep warm. What little we wore, we damped so that it might cling to the figure. And now —look! If I had been seen at a ball with a face glistening like that, my dear mamma would have whipped me."

I walked from room to room and noticed how men and girls stared at me when they came in and found me alone. I went to my bedroom, but the sound of music from below reminded me only that I lived, as it were, beyond the world's circle, and made me as hungry for companionship as I had been for solitude. Going downstairs, I saw, in the hall below, Clare parrying three young men who were disputing their right to dance with her.

"I think I'll rest," she said, sitting down on a great Welsh dower-chest. There had been exhaustion in her voice and movement, but in a moment she straightened herself and was entertaining the three young men, who stood clumsily about her.

"Won't you be too tired to bowl again tomorrow, Mr. Connolly?"

"Oh no," said he. "Besides, we may win the toss and bat first."

One of his companions, determined that Connolly should not monopolize his hostess, said that he thought the upper meadow was an awfully fine ground. "You must be proud of it, Mrs. Fullaton."

The third young man, feeling, perhaps, that Clare was an exceptional woman, and not wishing to appear in her eyes a barbarian, said—not so proud as she was of the pictures, he was sure. She glanced at him and asked which picture had particularly pleased him, whereupon he looked round him wildly, like a poor shot when birds are

driven over, and said *that* one—half-way up the first flight—was, he thought, awfully picturesque.

His raised arm pointed straight at me, for I was leaning on the banisters above their heads. Clare's face came up. As she saw me, the smile she had been using towards these young men vanished, and her eyes darkened. I turned away to look at the picture which its admirer had called picturesque. It was a facile portrait by de Loutherbourg of a lady with pearl earrings and hair that straggled on her neck; Mr. Fullaton had often lectured me on its technical brilliance.

"Oh," said Clare, "is that your favourite? I like the blue of her dress."

The music had ceased. Arm in arm Clare's guests came through the hall. How ugly laughter is if you see only the open mouth, not the smile that preceded the gape!

"Oh, Ma'am," said one as she passed, "lovely it is, and that's the truth."

"I don't think you know my boy, Ma'am," said another. "It was he as worked the score-board this a'ternoon. He's a good boy, Willie, an' growin' up now. This is his first Canterbury, Ma'am, if I may be so bold."

"Why," said Clare, "we all call it Canterbury!"

When the countrywoman and her son had gone their way, Miss Etta and her partner detached themselves from the throng and took post beside Clare. This, after all, was Thursday night, not Saturday; she was dancing because Clare had said

that everyone must dance and because, of course, the village people enjoyed it; but she liked to stand beside her hostess now and then, a little aloof in the midst of affability, as at a children's party. "Aren't they fun?" she said to Clare. "Such dears!"

The music began again. The crowd moved back.

"Oh, Nigel!" Clare said. And she added: "Take me out on to the lawn—quickly, before my partner finds me, before I have to be pleasant again." Then smiling, she shook her head. "I can't cut a dance, of course. But why don't *you* escape from it?" She touched my arm. "What is the use, Nigel, dear? Nothing matters so much as we think."

"Oh, Mrs. Fullaton," George Currall's wife said as I left them, "wasn't that a wonderful catch of Mr. Trobey's this afternoon? I do hope he will repeat it for your husband's Eleven to-morrow."

Behind the house in the northern copse, where there were neither fairy lights nor chinese lanterns, nightingales were singing. When the Windrush and Thrusted Band were at supper, the song came sweet and clear to one who stood beyond the east wing; but it seemed to come from a great distance, as if across the croquet lawn there lay another and unattainable world.

"Nightingales, too," said a voice behind me. "Old Fullaton has everything on the premises. That girl of Ned's has done pretty well for herself, by all accounts."

"So has he, if you ask my opinion," said an

older and huskier voice. "He had an eye for a woman, that young man."

Their thoughts ran on together.

"No youngster yet, though."

"Not a sign."

That afternoon, a little before Pug Trobey made his famous catch, at the hour when summer daylight begins to weaken and grass to take on the strange, deep brightness which makes the movement of white-clothed men upon it seem a wheeling of brilliant ghosts, I had begun a sketch in water-colour of the upper meadow, of the trees over which the church tower threw up the pale gold of its ancient stone, and of the hills beyond them. Next morning I looked at the work I had done and put it heavily away from me. My hand had lost its skill or my thoughts had been astray. But suddenly there appeared in my mind the simplification I had been seeking. Thus the elm-trees should swing up across the light, and thus their shadow be stretched upon the green. My heart beat faster and for a moment my confidence returned. There was, I knew, deep folly in surrendering to the judgment of Coutisson —the deeper because the surrender was self-deception: my inward belief in myself was not affected by it. But my conduct and mood were shaken, and only in my painting of Miss Fullaton's portrait, because it now belonged to the

past, was there substance on which my mind might rest. While I was in her presence life stood still. Away from her were hesitancy, inaction, and a peculiar, inexplicable sense of Clare's increasing nearness, as if from the turmoil of Ned's Canterbury and the cloud of irrelevance implied in it she were continuously emerging. Our avoidances became significant of contact feared; our restraints served only to emphasize the imminent peril of yielding. We dared not be together because so ardently we desired it; and our deliberate partings bound us the more closely in imagination. If in easy forms of words—in the speech of courtesy, in the quiet language of friends—we strove, in each other's presence, to conceal what was within us, a trembling of voice, a catching of breath, a nervous movement of the hand, would betray it. In all but final action we were gathered into each other's arms; in thought, the struggle was ended. But in these moments we would stand facing each other, rigid and a little apart, and I would shiver to perceive how, with my own, her thought was flaming. For when I saw her thus, and while my passion answered hers, I remembered that the Clare I had first loved had not so desired me, nor I her. An irrecoverable beauty had vanished, leaving only its shell.

Beyond this intoxication of the mind which made all but its own fantasy seem unreal, Ned's

Canterbury continued. In the passages of the house were voices; on the lawns specks of brilliant colour; in all conversation hints of past jokes and intimacies of which I knew nothing. It was as if I stood by a roadside and watched stream past me a cheerful, indolent, foreign crowd which did not observe me, and whose language I did not understand. Sometimes the house became silent. Clocks chimed through open, sunlit doors; a dog slept in a stream of gold; all shadows were still. "They are gone to watch the cricket," I thought, and heard far away the click of a ball and from the staircase the hum of a bee imprisoned.

On Saturday evening, again when light was about to fail, I went out with water-colours, and, finding that the place I wished to occupy in the upper meadow was free of spectators, sat down and began to paint.

"You will see nothing from there," said a passer-by.

"No, Mr. Frew. Why don't you sit behind the bowler's arm?"

"By Jove, yes. Singstree is sending down some twisters."

"Couldn't you draw him running to the wicket? He runs so comically—bent sideways as if he were carrying a pail of water."

In the long grass behind me there was a harsh chirruping of insects and in the hedge a rustling of birds' wings. The shadows of distant elms stretched long arms towards the pitch, and the fieldsmen, about whose feet there appeared a

thin, translucent haze, seemed to be standing ankle-deep in an emerald pool. The church clock distantly struck an hour. Through the following silence came the tinkling of a bell in one of the lower meadows and fragments of rough song muffled by the rising ground. A boy stretched across the scoring-board and threw down a tin plate bearing the figure nine. The clangour of its fall, inaudible to me, set up a swirl of birds. When he had adjusted the telegraph and 100 shone upon it in battered white, there was a ripple of applause. The startled birds presently returned and disappeared among the grasses. Down the line of spectators two black figures were moving with silver trays.

"Run again, Sir. . . . Run . . .O-oh. . . ."

I looked down from sky to earth and saw the players moving in knots of whiteness and shadow away from the centre of the field. A figure, Ned's own, lingered, drew stumps, and ran off, swinging them. The match was over. The spectators grouped, scattered, moved away. A rook descended and surveyed the field of battle, a shining, metallic bird.

As I continued to paint, I began to know that Clare was approaching. For a little while she stood beside me without speaking, and I could hear her fingers move on the stuff of her dress and the tap of her locket against a ring.

"That is a success at last, isn't it, Nigel? You have what you wanted?"

"The drawing? Almost. But I wish I hadn't

begun it until the cricket was over. The field changed when the figures were gone."

"Changed?"

I could not tell her what the change had been; it was linked with a change in my own mood. When the players were there, I had been excluded; when they had gone, I was alone.

She watched me in silence until I rose and began to prepare for return to the house; then she said, as if in explanation of her coming:

"They go on Monday. . . . When they have gone, shall you be able to work again?" And added suddenly: "Why haven't you been able to work? Just the crowd and noise? But you might have shut yourself away from it. I wish you had."

"I think I need more than to shut myself away in Windrush."

She threw me a look of alarm and evasion. Did she not even now acknowledge in her own heart the change that had come to her? Was our secret, though it burned her as well as me, still inwardly unconfessed? She was setting up barriers against knowledge of herself. As we walked, she began to talk of Ned, as if to speak of her husband enabled her to feel that she was standing on firm ground. "Ned is a dear," she said. "I wish I didn't laugh at him sometimes. But he and I haven't the same sense of humour. . . . His Canterbury is almost worth it—he enjoys it so much."

Then at last, as if by facing it she were trying

to drive away a following ghost, she asked me directly whether I remembered Lisson. How long ago it seemed! Beneath the almost frivolous tone was an agonized seriousness.

"It's like looking back after a day's walk," she said, "and trying to imagine where you'd have come to if, ages ago, you'd turned to the right instead of the left. If we had run away then, Nigel——" She hesitated—on the edge of the truth. Though she dared not openly advance, she could not now turn back. "It's odd how things happen," she went on with a catch of breath. "Instead of walking here and dancing to-night, and to-morrow in the Fullaton pew staring through the sermon at the Fullaton angel—it's fun to imagine the miracle, to have life both ways. Where should we have been—in Italy? I've never been there. This evening we'd go down to the sea. Our windows would look out over a sandy bay—empty, with the water cool and waiting. We'd go down to the sea, and swim out, and swim until we could see the lights in our own windows high up in the sky. And then——"

"Clare!" I cried.

She turned and said swiftly with cruelty and self-deception—but with cruelty not towards me: "But, Nigel, it was all over long ago. For you, I mean—as well. Haven't we been long enough at Windrush together to be friends and smile over it all? You were a boy then. You wouldn't

run away with me now." She looked into my face and somehow laughed: "Would you?"

"If we could go back," I said, "if we could both be as we then were—— Oh, Clare, why do you ask all this?"

We had come to the outskirts of the garden and she turned to look westward.

"Do you know," she said, "I feel sometimes when I'm with you, Nigel, that for a moment all this has disappeared, and that I have gone back to being a girl again." And, having now thrown off the fierce wild gaiety with which she had at once protected and tormented herself, she gave me the girl's smile, sad, doubtful, but mysteriously delighted, which I had first known in her.

"Clare Sibright!" she said. "It seems almost as if something that was mine had been stolen from me—never to be Clare Sibright again. After all, she was my first self. . . . She was myself—and is, sometimes, even now."

As we drew near to the house, there was a movement at one of the windows on the first floor.

"Look!" Clare exclaimed. "What is he trying to say?"

Leaning across his window-sill was Ned with right arm outstretched. With his left hand he was making urgent but incomprehensible signs. Not until we were near enough to see the anxious knitting of his brows did it become apparent that in one palm he held a watch to which, between

beckonings to Clare, he pointed. She waved her hand in acknowledgment.

"He means," she said, "that I am in danger of being late for dinner. . . . This is the great occasion of Ned's year—the Canterbury Ball. You know that he will make a speech to-night?"

He and the Hornets and their ladies dined heavily and toasted one another. I began to remember another dinner when Agatha Trobey had sat beside me and a magic of wild expectation had invested Clare. As I now looked towards her down the great table, I understood that there was ground on which I could never approach her. There was a part of her that belonged to these people; she was at ease and never shy; they did not suspect in her a stranger among them. And I wished that I also could break through the feeling of isolation by which I was enwrapped—a feeling in which pride and a childish shrinking were so strangely mingled that I knew not how to distinguish them. I looked towards each of my neighbours in turn. One was turned away from me, but the other, with a pretty peevish face, was sitting silently at my right hand. Her eyes questioned me; clearly she expected me to speak, and my mind sprang to a dozen easy sayings to any of which, I do not doubt, she would have answered readily enough. But I could not ask her of cricket when she knew I had taken no

part in it. She would despise me for so false, so struggling a speech, more than for my silence. I remained tongue-tied, and her eyes again stole nervously towards me. Then she threw up her head and looked desperately to her right, but found no help there. And suddenly I heard her saying, with a difficult movement of her throat, as if the words were being forced into utterance:

"Did I see you painting the match this afternoon, Mr. Frew?"

I said it was the field I had been painting, not, in fact, the cricketers.

"Do you mean you just left them out?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

It seemed suddenly important that I should make her understand that the reason had not been that I despised the cricketers, which was, I thought, the impression in her mind, and I began to explain that what I had wanted was to paint the landscape in a state of rest after activity. . . . "But surely," she said, "the landscape looks the same during the match and when it is ended?"

"I don't think it does," I replied and faltered. "You see, if men are there they produce one of two effects—either the landscape becomes a background to them or it dwarfs them. In any case it exists in a—an actual human relationship. But when the game is over. . . ." Looking into her puzzled eyes, I faltered again.

"I think I know," she said, "what you mean. What are you going to call your picture?"

"Call it? Oh, it hasn't got a name."

"Would 'After Cricket' do? Do call it that!"

Then she had after all understood what I was seeking in my drawing! This supposed discovery filled me with joy.

"I thought a minute ago," I exclaimed eagerly, "that you and I were almost different beings. When you asked me about my drawing, I imagined that you were in a way despising me for sitting at the side of the field and not watching the cricket and not being interested in what—in what the others were interested in. And you, too —you seemed to be afraid of me. But now——"

"Oh," she said, "what makes you imagine that I was afraid of you?"

Her voice and manner had changed. I had reached out towards her mind; she was frigidly protecting it, and was looking at me now as if she thought that I was mad. But I persisted wildly and foolishly, thinking that even now I might break down the barrier between myself and one of those whom I had always supposed to be strangers to me.

"Oh," she said quickly, "what are you talking about? You are so excited. Everyone will be looking at us. I only asked you about your picture."

"But you understood when I spoke of it. You were interested; I never thought you would be. You suggested a name for it."

"A name?"

" 'After Cricket.' "

"That!" she answered. "Well, I thought it was

rather a pretty name. There was no need to get so excited about it."

I knew then how great a fool I had been, but amid my shame I was amused by the anger with which she turned away from me and by the indignant flaming of her cheeks. But amusement died, leaving me cold and possessed by an embarrassment of the very soul. Soon, I thought, she will tell some friend of my behaviour—of so much of it as she can tell without herself appearing ridiculous; the tale will go round—one of many, perhaps; in the end Clare will hear it. I looked towards Clare, almost expecting to find in her face an expression of smiling contempt for one who made such blunders in the world.

Her eyes were upon me, eyes caught unawares, and no smile was on her lips. There shone on me an emotion so jealously secret within her own heart that my encountering it laid her heart bare. In an instant she commanded herself and began to speak rapidly words I could not hear. But blood had risen to my temples; my body was lined with fire and ice. The faces over which my gaze travelled were vague ovals and rectangles swung in a mist. Were we all naked animals sitting in our clothes? Was it an intuitive knowledge and hatred of this, rather than indignation against me, which had caused the girl at my side to preserve so desperately the smooth surfaces of conversation? "But others are masters of these thoughts," I decided. "I alone am mastered by them. They

control or avoid them, but I, in these last days, have lost control or am speedily losing it. I am like a man who hangs between sleep and waking; my mind drifts and I cannot check it."

Dinner was ended. The cloth had been taken away and beneath every plate there was a blue reflection in the table's gloss. Speeches had been made; I had risen once or twice to my feet with the coolness of a wineglass stem beneath my fingers. Now we had shifted a little in our chairs and turned towards Ned, who was returning thanks for the compliments that had been paid him.

If there were Canterburys when he was seventy, would he stand there an old man, and opposite him would there be his wife with her skin dried and loosened?

His speech cleverly fitted its purpose. He knew these people and how not to offend them; he was among friends and warmly satisfied by their approval. In both matches, he said, the Hornets had been beaten—"a double victory for us veterans, which the ladies, whom the Hornets brought with them, have—ah—more than avenged by their conquests in a different field. In any case, both matches were precious near shaves, particularly the first, which, as we all remember, might have had a different result if the Hornets' finest bat had known who the substitute was that lurked in the deep field; if

he had known," Ned repeated with emphasis, "that this elegant and anonymous creature was concealing in his trouser pockets as safe a pair of hands as has ever earned a Blue." At this Lord Singstree said loudly: "Good old Pug," and a discreet feminine purring endorsed his opinion.

Ned, thus encouraged, took breath and swelled a little. His speech was full of names, which gave opportunity for affable murmurs of all kinds and set the whole table contentedly smiling. The girl on my right turned her head swiftly to see if I too was smiling, and as swiftly looked away again.

"And now you have heard enough of my voice." ("No, no," the table cried, and Singstree protested: "You haven't mentioned me, Ned.") This was an informal occasion, Ned explained . . . just a gathering of friends. . . . The drawing-rooms had been cleared for dancing, and the ladies were still with us. . . . A piano had been brought in and, "in accordance with a Windrush custom," we would entertain ourselves until our guests arrived for the dance.

"While we sit here," I thought, "some of those guests are already on their way, for they drive long distances across country. The carriages come by solitary roads; their lamplight, for there is no moon, is sliding along the hedgerows. Inside they are sitting huddled in half-darkness. Soon they will be entering the hall and blinking at the candles. Clare will be giving them her hand; they will touch her and laugh and hear her voice.

Someone presently will dance with her. I shall ask her to dance; she will consent with a look of fear and pleasure and entreaty. We shall dance into the throng, out of the world. I shall touch her and be alone no more."

Singstree had his mandolin—the same mandolin of which Richard had told my father and mother that night at home. Was there not a song which my mother had checked on Richard's lips? Though I strove to remember the song, nothing would enter my mind but the portrait of Miss Fullaton with the frigate, which was now hanging before my eyes above the mantelpiece, and the frosted globe of the dining-room lamp at Drufford. On this, when I was a small boy, I had once scrawled in pencil. There in my vision were the guilty scrawlings still.

And suddenly the words of the song came back to the mandolin's accompaniment. Memory and hearing were mingled, and the small boy who had drawn a horse and rider on the dining-room lamp seemed now to be sitting at a great table bestrewn with glass and silver, and watching in astonishment the grinning of these who listened to Old Drooper's song.

O Mothers of daughters
Beware when the waters
In winter are covered with ice.
Its kind introductions
Have often caused ructions
In plans of both mother and mice . . .

There was a gathering of breath behind and around me, and a moment of hesitation. Singstree waved an encouraging arm and the chorus followed—

In plans of both mother and mice!

As the song continued, and there were many verses of it, its tawdry humours, permitted tonight "in accordance with a Windrush custom," which had an origin in old Oxford days, coyly skirted the edge of salacity. With what smugness it withdrew when all seemed lost! And how strangely the Hornets' ladies braced themselves to smile and applaud. But this was a generation that loved facetiousness; it was censorious but unfastidious; it enjoyed heartiness, however undiscriminating, more than all else in the world. What was shouted by a peer with a mandolin was beyond its criticism, and Singstree's entertainment was applauded to the end.

A little man now arose who had muffed two catches and scored nothing. His sister, who went with him to the piano, was plain and anxious. He had been asked to sing because the Hornets' captain, challenged for musical talent in his team, had replied that Diffid-Smith "had a voice." He had, indeed.

"I'm afraid," he said, noticing perhaps that his appearance had been greeted with no more than polite enthusiasm, "that Lord Singstree's a difficult man to come after." Then he shifted his feet

and began. At the sound of his own voice, beautiful and clear, he re-won confidence and his expression changed. He had forgotten Lord Singstree, forgotten his audience; there was for him on earth nothing but his song. He sang first in French—two traditional airs that threw the heart back to love's ancient courtesies, and to the melancholy of passion amid wars. His own being entered into them; he seemed, as an artist, to confess himself.

"It's all jolly well," said a muffled voice behind me under cover of formal hand-clapping, "but it's an awful mistake on an evening like this."

Of this Diffid-Smith, when he came to earth, seemed already to be aware. His alarmed eyes met his sister's; there was a hurried consultation between them. "Encore, encore!" cried Ned, a generous host. As if facing his executioners, Diffid-Smith drew himself up and, making what he hoped might be a concession to their taste, sang an old drinking-song. But even the word drink failed to placate them. His executioners grunted and flapped their hands. The boy and his sister returned to their places. "All jolly well, of course," said the voice behind me.

But in the little silence that followed, Clare leaned forward in her place and said:

"Will your brother sing for me to-morrow? Will you promise? I have heard nothing so beautiful—so genuinely beautiful—for years."

The plain, anxious girl to whom she spoke

could answer only: "Oh, yes—yes please . . ." but her eyes shone with pride and tears.

"And now, Pug, it's your turn," Ned commanded.

The company sighed its relief and cheered its satisfaction.

"More to my taste anyway," said the now familiar voice.

The songs continued. Clare, pale and fiery-eyed, was leaning back in her chair, her fingers wrapped over its arms. The songs continued still. Ned was about to call upon a new singer. Suddenly she rose. Ned stared, hesitated an instant, and obeyed. Her determination to make an end was not to be mistaken.

There are in life, and particularly in early youth, days of crisis which are remembered less by their decisive action than by the anticipatory moods that precede it. The action is, indeed, remembered; the mind clearly records it: this I said, thus I acted, so it fell out. These records are truly historical, and the tale, while we tell it in later years, seems a tale of a being not ourselves. But before the action there were precedent moods, like the unheeded warnings of fever, which we knew not then to be anticipatory, but which seem in retrospect to have been prophetic. These, when we look back upon them, we do not record as history is recorded, with a mind turned objectively

on a past in which we were remotely young; instead, we live through them again, and our boy's heart leaps or faints anew. Feeling once more about us the early hours of the day of crisis, we perceive their promise or foreboding and tremble for their event.

So when I look back upon the Sunday that followed the Canterbury dance, I cease to be a spectator and am plunged, not in the cool past, but in an ardent present. I see Clare and Lord Singstree, dressed for church, leaning a little towards each other in the hall with a time-table open on the chest between them. "I'm afraid I really must go by the evening train," says he. "I have an appointment in London early Monday morning," and Ned intervenes with: "Then we'll order the carriage and Clare will arrange an early dinner for you." The hall empties and I am left standing in it alone. Entering the library I see out of its southern window a stream of church-goers, with Clare in their midst, moving across the lawn towards the lake and upper meadow. Henry Fullaton comes last from the house. His eyes look in upon me through the open window.

"Not coming?"

"No, Sir. I think not."

"Anything wrong?"

"No, Sir—nothing."

"What are you going to do—work?"

"The last touches to Miss Fullaton's portrait."

"Ah—that still!"

He points to his guests. "I must be after them," and turns his back on me.

Soon his footsteps are on grass and nothing is to be heard but the church bells. They change their chime, slacken to a single persistent stroke, and stop. My thought continues: "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness. . . . Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness. . . . Is she looking now at the Fullaton angel? Shall I, though I live to be an old man, ever produce work so beautiful as that? But am I not, when I use the word beautiful, repeating a dead formula? The beauty of the Fullaton angel no longer possesses me. I am cast out from peace and can neither enjoy nor create. My desire is the desire of heat and blood. She is kneeling in the church, her face hidden in her hands. Her body is curved in an attitude of prayer; and behind the hands—what face?

"Who is she that I desire? How shall I escape or how be satisfied? For it is a ghost I love, but a woman in that ghost's likeness whom I desire. All night in dream a body lay with my body, but my spirit from afar off observed them."

Beyond the hills a white cloud is shredded by wind. Here the bushes shiver and the grasses at the meadow's edge ruffle from green to grey. "If I were a child," my thought insists, "I should lie in the sunshine and listen to the movement of

leaves and dream of the days when I should become man. If I were a boy, as I was but a year ago, I should dream of the conquest of the world, not doubting my own powers, for fate itself would be a box unopened lying within my reach. The thought of love would be to me the sap, not the poison, of my art. It would be adventure's own cry and the endorsement of faith. It would stand within my single-heartedness; it would not divide me; and, when others smiled wisely, I should know my love to be wiser than they. Now I have tasted life and am not its master. . . . But do I desire to be master?" My own thought answers me: "You who have known what devotion is and have abandoned it, how shall you ever be master? Your mind is with breasts and flanks to possess them. Once you looked in her eyes for the holiness that none but you could see; now even in her attitude of prayer you covet her, and discover, because her body is curved, the tautening of her naked side."

To escape this conflict, I seek Miss Fullaton's room, knowing that I shall be happy in her presence. The bodily fires are long dead in her. To be with her will be like walking on a gusty evening among dead leaves.

"Come," she says, "stand close to me," and peers into my face. "You have not slept, boy. You are wearing yourself out." Her hands draw me down. "Cry if you will. I am not so young a woman that I am contemptuous of a man's

tears. . . . I am not so soft a woman neither that I dare not tell a man of genius when he is a fool."

Of genius? I am trapped and look up.

"Ah," says she, "the word strikes fresh? Now can you master yourself?"

All the afternoon the river Windrush, seen from Thrusted Hill, flows from lead to silver beneath clouds lightly driven, and the countryside is a carpet of orchards and meadows. "If I could be transported from here by magic," I think, "then to-morrow would be newly made." The thought is idle and drifts away until my hand in my pocket closes upon a stiff crumpled paper which I find to be my father's old letter.

We were glad to hear of the progress you have made. The Fullatons must be very kind people. I had a letter from Mr. F. (it came by the same post as yours) in which he spoke very highly of the work you have done and said that he had asked an eminent French critic to come to the Manor to see it. I shall be interested to hear what he says. If his report on your progress is as favourable as we all hope, then perhaps after Christmas the move from Windrush which you suggested might, upon Mr. Fullaton's advice, be considered. But you must not try to run, my dear boy, before you can walk. Be patient. All things come, they say, to those who wait, and, if in waiting we include working as well, that is, I think, a true word. I have always found it so myself. Your mother and Richard send their love. Ethel would join if she were here, but she is out this afternoon at tea with the Holts. She and Miss Marjorie Holt are great friends nowadays—always in each

other's pockets. No doubt they will join us in church this evening. It is now almost time we were getting ready so will cut this letter short. It has been fine all day, but the wind rough—too rough for Ethel's church-going hat, she says. Let us know about the Frenchman, but do not go too much by him, good or bad. The French are erratic fellows at best. You must not think we are not interested in *everything* connected with your Art. I don't pretend to understand all about it, but it has been the profession of many good men, and may it bring you much happiness and prosperity is my wish. I am sending you half of a £5 note with this. The other half shall follow. This, with what you have, will be enough for your little needs for some time to come. You must be careful to pay your share of painting materials. Now I hear the maid in the hall brushing my hat, so must end.

Your loving father,

ROBERT FREW.

The familiar signature dances in the Herefordshire sunlight. I see the maid holding out my father's silk hat, and my mother waiting for him, with prayer book and hymn book hanging from her wrist in a leather case. If I had been a boy I should have thrust my hand into my father's and should have marched off at his side—never to be safer in this world. "All things come, they say, to those who wait, and, if in waiting we include working as well, that is, I think, a true word." I am far away from him. His hand is no longer large enough to hold mine. The letter is buried among the gorse bushes and loose earth pounded over it with my fist.

The house, as I come down the hill, swims up

from the beginning of dusk. I will go to the studio and work there . . . but the studio at this hour will be full of guests. If I enter, their eyes will turn, their voices drop; I shall not know near whom to sit, for none will bid me to a place beside him. I will not go to the studio, then, but will walk round the house, guessing the quietness of the farther meadows, and presently. . . . But through the open window of the library I hear Clare's voice: "No, you mean to be kind, but you go too far." The door slams; it seems that she is alone.

When I reach the library she is not alone, for Ned stands by the fireplace, staring down at her. On her lap is a book, but she is not reading it.

"There is one other thing, Clare."

"Yes?"

"Singstree's early dinner before his train; he will be in solitary state."

"Unless you sit with him."

"You know I can't. Stone is coming to see me about Tuesday's market."

"At that time?"

"It's his only time. Hullo, here's Nigel. . . . That's settled, then, Clare? You'll entertain Singstree while he dines?"

"If I must."

"Someone must. . . . He's a good fellow, old Drooper. Deuced fine company. . . . I'll be off then."

Though the sky is light and the curtains are

not yet drawn, the room is full of heavy shadows which seem like a wall about us. When she rises she is a being of silver walking on the dark; when, as we go out, she speaks of the open air and the coolness of evening, the walls vanish, the grass is under our feet, and soon above us are the trees beside the lake throwing out faint odours of resin. Now I am afraid no more, nor is my heart divided. We have walked together from the unendurable, and have thrown down the defences that were our prison. There has been no need of words, for in our hearts all is acknowledged, and, though we speak, our minds are charged with expectations beyond our words.

Is she also remembering, in the long silence while she stands looking down into the water, how in another darkness we stood together and she laid her hands in mine?—for now, turning to me, she lets me take her hands. At the touch so great a trembling passes through her that it seems for an instant that she shrinks from me, and I tighten my hold, feeling her fingers loose in mine; but it is not misgiving that has shaken her. Over her face a bough's shadow lies like a mask. But suddenly her face is hidden; her kisses are upon my hands and the cool pressure of her cheek.

In the fragment of time in which her face is concealed, before I can seize her shoulders and raise her—— What lips are these that touch me? my heart demands. As I lift her up, what face shall I see? And it seems, as her breast sways

to me and my lips fall upon hers, that there lies upon them the sweetness that was in the beginning of the world. She is a girl and it is her girlhood that she confides to me, joining the springs of her life with mine. Searching for this miracle, I fall back to contemplate her face. The lips are slack; the throat moves to a visible pulse; the eyes blaze from a dream; over all a bough's shadow lies like a mask. She is not a girl, but a woman who yields to me her beauty; her passion sucks at life's springs. We stand apart, discovering each other's identity, feeling the air upon our hands, gathering to our nostrils the scents of the trees.

I am alone beside the lake. How long has she gone? Before she went, we spoke naturally together, but I do not know in what spirit she left me, save that she went calmly as if her mind were clear. To-morrow, to-night even, she and I shall meet again and shall add to the passion of these kisses the passion of concealment. Whatever the issue in hunger or satisfaction, in declaration or secrecy, we shall move henceforward nakedly within each other's thoughts, for lust is encamped within us.

In the house the candles are lighted. A voice calls from the dining-room as I pass through the hall. "Ned, is that you?" At the end of the long table, with Ferrers behind him, Singstree sits alone.

The stairs are beneath my feet, for I am sudden in resolve. My mind now is clear, and I count the pounds and shillings which lie upon a table in my room. A candle shows them to me—enough for escape; enough to make me a wanderer in the world. There is little I shall need, little I have time for.

Miss Fullaton's room gives no answer to my knocking. Beyond its emptiness an open door appears, a rectangle of golden light. "Come in!" she cries, and there, with head thrown back, she sits before her mirror with her maid hard-lipped beside her, and half her face, as yet unprepared, a thick, whitish grey.

"Well, Sir? What news?"

I cannot speak. The maid stares at my intrusion.

"I am going!" I cry at last.

"When?"

"Now."

"To-night?"

"This instant."

What is she reaching for? "That, Robinson, give me that. . . . Take it, Sir, it has waited for you almost too long. . . . Take it, boy, do not stay now to thank old women."

In the hall, for the first time, my heart sickens. Henry Fullaton stares at me, at my bag, my hat, my coat.

"I must go, Sir! I must go!"

A long look, a long struggle.

"Do you go to paint?"

"Yes, Sir, and when you know——"

"If you go to paint, that is all I ask. . . . Yes, Ned, Nigel is going with Lord Singstree. The evening train. Why? Oh—well—very simple, very simple—ah, there's the carriage. In with you. Time's running on. Where's Clare?"

"She's dressing," Ned answers. "Sorry, Singstree. I'll say good-bye to you for her—unless she said good-bye at dinner."

"At dinner?"

"Didn't she talk to you while you dined?"

"Er—no."

"Indeed. . . ."

They are the lamps of my own carriage that slide along the hedgerows to-night. The long figure in the corner stretches thin legs on to the opposite seat.

"Bit sudden, eh?"

"Yes."

"Where to, if one may ask?"

"Paris."

The word glows in silence. Beneath my fingers is the envelope Miss Fullaton gave to me. Out of it two other envelopes slide.

"You can't read that in this light. Try a match."

A fizz in the darkness, a long hand extended, old Drooper's lanky face behind the glow.

On one envelope: "Monsieur Pierre Coutisson, Paris."

On the other: "Fee. Portrait of a Wreck. Frs. 2,000," and a date six weeks old.

V

DRUFFORD REVISITED

After three years of work in Paris, I came to England again in the late summer of 1879. To return to one's childhood's home after long and fruitful absences is to discover the removes of life. The boy that was marches beside the man that is, and looks at him with puzzled eyes as at a stranger; and the man, feeling that ghostly scrutiny as he walks again among the deep intimacies of his former dwelling-place, remembers the early rush of his dreams, and knows his departures.

On a half-landing of our house at Drufford was a white door leading into a linen-room. One side of the door-frame was never repainted, for against it my father had made his children stand each birthday while he measured and marked our increasing heights, using as ruler a broad, flat volume laid horizontally on our heads. There now, as I came downstairs to tea after my return from Paris, I read my bodily history in a series of lines against which my father had written: Nigel 6, Nigel 7, Nigel 8. . . . When I went to France, though the measurements of me had ceased, I had still been, in my father's view, a part

of that childish series—Nigel 18. It had been a reason for humiliation in me that not he only but a great part of the world had so regarded me. I had longed for a recognition of manhood in me, and been made boyishly indignant by every unthinking denial of it. Looking now at the door-frame and remembering those indignations, I could smile at them. It was a smile from afar. The boy whose head had strained upward beneath the book was no longer myself. I stood outside him, could see him; I belonged no more, as he did, to the parental series. In short, I had grown up. Nor was I alone aware of the change. My family was a little shy of the new-comer. To my father himself I had become a distinct being—a very different creature from Nigel 21.

The routine and the outward character of my home were unchanged. On week-days they breakfasted at eight and drank tea; on Sundays at nine and drank coffee. In the evenings they sat in the same chairs. Soon after ten had struck upon the marble clock my father closed his portable desk and announced: "Bedtime," whereupon they rose and went to their rooms, he staying behind to blow down the chimney of the lamp with the frosted globe. Richard was still a young man of great promise and considerable achievement in his profession. He dressed well and trimly, was self-confident and quick. It was implied that he was on terms with the world. But sometimes he sighed and sometimes he yawned, and I under-

stood that there was a mechanism in his self-confidence, and that his life, which had seemed to me so brilliantly glamorous, was not all glamorous to him. He and Ethel still clung together, but there was a hardening in their companionship; youth had begun to fade from it, and they to talk with almost greedy reminiscence of the gaieties of once upon a time. Were these the world's conquerors, the envied patterns of boyhood? Were these they who had possessed the supreme gift of knowing how not to be shy; whose ease and wisdom had promised to them all the privileges of earth denied to me? Were these the hero and heroine, admired of all men? Richard was still undefeated. What his ability and ambition would yield to him still had value in his eyes. He held his head up and could to his own heart play the hero still. But Ethel had looked into her mirror and feared, and had looked into her heart and been weary. Even her defiance now had not the free impulse of the girl's defiance. She was pretty; her flesh was young; but she had begun to guess, by some mysterious and bitter intuition, that her youth would never avail her.

That she, and even Richard in certain moods, seemed now to envy me threw back my boyhood into a separated past, and when, in her company, I walked by what had been Mr. Doggin's house and was told that some people named Sellerby now lived in it, that separated past arose before me to insist that it belonged to a world that was

gone. Mr. Doggin's death excited no emotion in Ethel. She was telling me that the Sellerbys, "like everyone else in Drufford, were dull as ditch-water."

"Where did they bury him?" I asked.

"Who? Mr. Doggin? Oh, not in Drufford at all. They took him away."

"And his drawings and possessions?"

"I don't know. Never heard."

We were infinitely apart, my sister and I, I had begun to think, and was wondering, with a feeling of frustration, whether anything could even now be done to chase the discontent from her eyes, when she asked suddenly:

"Did you ever write to him?"

"Sometimes."

"Not much though, did you? He used to ask about you. I think he felt you had forgotten him. Why didn't you write, Nigel? I thought you were fond of him."

I tried to answer that question for myself as well as for her. While I was in Paris all my past life had seemed to be enclosed by a wall that shut me off from it. In the work I was doing I had lived and in that only.

"That's excuses, Nigel. I think you might have written more, if you cared for him so much."

To this I made no answer and presently she said: "I shouldn't be at all surprised if you did turn out to be a great artist. . . . You have the hard streak. You don't take much trouble—not

when you're working anyway—about the ordinary kindnesses of life. Everyone else go hang. You should have seen Papa's face when he heard how you had gone away to Paris without a word. What are you going to do now? Stay here as long as it suits you and then disappear again?"

I felt then, and have always felt, so little sympathy with the theory that an artist may treat the world as selfishly as he pleases, that Ethel's reproof, though spoken with exaggerated bitterness, struck home. It is generally a puny, thwarted mind that claims the selfish privilege; genius in progress seldom has need of it. What had been in my father's face when I went away "without a word"? Had my old master been hurt by my neglect of him? And Henry Fullaton, whose generosity I had so roughly cut short—how far had he understood my necessity and forgiven me? I realized now for the first time that for three years, while I was winning for myself the beginning of reputation in a remote world, while I was becoming a man and achieving the independence which I now possessed, a part of my mind had been frozen.

"I suppose you wrote to Clare Fullaton?" Ethel proceeded. "Didn't you imagine yourself to be half in love with her once?"

"Oh yes," I answered, "we wrote to each other."

"She and Ned have gone out to Norway for the fishing," Ethel said. "We shan't see them at

Lisson this year. Are you coming there? Mrs. Trobey would ask you if she knew you were home —particularly," she added with a sting of sarcasm, "now that you are going to be famous."

Not only Ethel, but all my family were anxious to know what plans I had made. How long did I intend to stay? Where did I propose to go?

"Well, my boy," my father said, "what does it feel like to be back again? No doubt Drufford seems a poor place after Paris, but in some ways, I dare say, you're glad to be home. If you thought you'd like to stay here, we could arrange for you to have one of the rooms as a studio and your mother would make it comfortable for you."

This offer marked my emancipation as nothing else could have done. My father had recognized my profession. Something in his manner and in the eagerness with which my mother replied that she would indeed make my studio "as comfortable as can be," suddenly drew from my parents the mask of years which they had always worn in my presence, and enabled me to see them as what they still were in their own thoughts—lovers who had young children and were puzzled by the movement of their children away from them. This was the nature of their possessiveness against which Ethel had always rebelled, by which Richard was being conquered; in it, but for an accident, I too might have been absorbed. This was their strength and weakness, their kindness and cruelty. I saw them in a flash, not as parents,

but as man and woman, and guessed the roots of their stern loyalty to us and to each other. "And if I can see them thus," I thought, "I am their little child no more, and I am their last. In recognizing me, they are recognizing their old age and bidding farewell to their own youth."

How was I to tell them that I would not stay and that they must arrange no studio for me? Yet it was necessary that they should be told, and when the telling was done I knew, from the way they looked at each other, that they had expected nought else and did not blame me. I told them that I had not decided what I should do next. I might return to Paris or go, as Pierre Coutisson had now suggested, to Rome. Richard asked abruptly whether I could keep myself by my painting.

"He has never asked for a penny from us," said my father with pride, "all the time he has been away."

"Oh yes," I answered, wondering what kind of curiosity had prompted Richard's question, "I can keep myself."

"But is there a real living in it?"

"Well—I live."

"Pretty thin sometimes?"

"Very thin sometimes," I answered, remembering the fights of my first months in Paris, "but you know there's a queer kind of pleasure in that. It's that more than anything else which

gives you a feeling of being—of being shut in with your work."

I did not know how to make them share in imagination the extraordinary seclusion, the sense of inward peace, that had been mine when I broke free of the world in which I had been brought up. My life had become suddenly independent and exciting as it had never been before. "Sometimes when I was alone at night and had been alone all day," I began, "it seemed that I only was alive in a world quite empty and silent. I felt——"

"Not much good being an artist in an empty world, Nigel," said Richard.

"No," I answered, "except at moments. It's not much good being an artist in a world that's never empty. Do you see what I mean?"

"No, frankly I don't," said Richard; and I do not blame him.

At this point my mother intervened to say: "I don't like the idea of your being alone so much, Nigel, dear. Had you no nice friends in Paris? That, I think, is the disadvantage of being abroad —you get into un-English ways and lose touch with your real friends." She bit off a thread. "Mr. Fullaton now. You ought not to lose touch with him."

"I should think," said Ethel, "that the Fullatons have had enough of Nigel. Have you ever written to them since you came back?"

"Yes."

"And had an answer?"

"Yes. Mr. Fullaton asked me to go there. I said I couldn't."

"Oh, Nigel," my mother exclaimed, "you ought not to have done that!"

"It's just like him," said Ethel. "The artistic temperament, you know." And Richard, lowering his book, stared at me with penetrating inquiry.

I answered, with the sort of dishonesty which the convention of my own home made inevitable, that as I might not be long in England I had thought I would spend my time at Drufford—at any rate that I would not go so far afield as Windrush.

"I think you were wrong there, my boy," my father replied with decision. "After all, it would have been courteous to go—some kind of reparation, too, for—well, there's no need to go over the old ground. Besides, if you're to be an artist, Mr. Fullaton is not a man to lose sight of. It's a fine thing to have these Frenchmen thinking so well of you, but all men—and artists not less than most, I'll venture to say—have their fits and fads. Mr. Fullaton's a good sound judge with a knowledge of the requirements of your own country. You oughtn't to lose touch with him, I'm sure. Doesn't do to have all your eggs in one basket."

"And now that poor old Miss Fullaton's dead," my mother added, "and his son and daughter-in-law are away in Norway, he must be lonely in that great house. This would have been just the time."

While they were speaking, Clare, the true but scarcely acknowledged cause of my avoidance of Windrush, had come towards me out of the separated and frozen past. Perhaps her image would not even then have presented itself but for Richard's prompting gaze of suspicion. "He is thinking," I said within me, "that I am afraid of Clare, and wondering how afraid I am and why."

"Yes," I answered dully to my mother, "I had forgotten, when I wrote, that Ned and his wife were away."

But that was a lie, and I became suddenly aware, as I spoke it, that all my family, except my father, knew it to be a lie. I had by no means forgotten that Clare was absent from Windrush. Her absence had sprung into my mind when I had received Henry Fullaton's letter and had controlled my reply to it. "If she is not there," I had cried, "then I am free to go. But if she is not there," I had added, "I will not." The latter thought had been but a whispering in my mind. Not until I lied to my family did I understand the nature of its influence.

For the same reason—that in Paris I had broken free from my ghosts and had neither wish nor courage to return to them—I said again and again that I did not wish to go with my brother and sister to Lisson in September, and prevented Ethel from writing to Mrs. Trobey to ask that I might be invited. But there came one morning a letter from Agatha Trobey addressed to me.

My mother [she said] heard from Mr. Henry Fullaton that you are in England again and has written to Ethel to ask you to come to us. Please say "yes." Mr. Fullaton will be here; so you can see him without going to Windrush—isn't that what you wish? And if you won't come for his sake, will you come because I ask it? I am an Ishmael here, you know, and tied down by my health, and should dearly love to have you in my nursery and hear the news of Paris and yourself. Besides, we shall be almost the same party as before, except for Ned and Clare; it will be amusing to see what has become of us all in—how long?—more than four years, isn't it? I don't think you will refuse to come.

I could not refuse.

"Do you remember," Richard said, "what excitement there was last time about your having the proper clothes?"

My mother laughed and shook her head. "Time runs on very quickly," she replied with forced brightness.

Though my decision to go to the Trobeys' was now taken, I did not reply to Agatha at once, but spent all that day in postponements. There was time enough, I said to Ethel when she asked at luncheon whether I had written yet; but the afternoon passed by, and I had done nothing but saw a few tree-trunks into lengths convenient for the axe. Richard, when he came home from his office, found me standing on a carpet of sawdust, and laughed at my energy; but he hung his coat on a branch and, taking one handle of a cross-cut, made me work with him. It was

good, he said, to have some exercise after a day in the City; and for an hour there was no sound but the hissing of steel and wood, the ring of the saw when it buckled, and the soft thud of each log as it fell. In lifting and carrying, I followed him obediently, as glad to be my elder brother's partner and to be lost in the task we had set ourselves, as if I had been still a little boy. When evening came, we went indoors together, boasting proudly to my father of how many lengths we had cut.

But after dinner, by the light of the dining-room lamp, I wrote to Agatha saying that I would come. As I sealed the letter, emotion caused my hand to tremble and a tingling to pass through my body—a seizure of joy and hunger and undefined expectation; above all, of self-commitment, of having taken a step that could never be recalled.

VI

LISSON AGAIN

THERE was a bleakness in the September day that brought us to Lisson, and a bleakness, I thought as I sat opposite her in the carriage, in Ethel's manner. Richard was deliberately vivacious and cheerful, but my sister wore the air of one who attends by custom an annual festival, formerly happy, from which the spirit is now gone.

The carriage wheels scarred the soft gravel of the Trobeys' drive, for in the night and morning there had been rain, and an overhanging branch, shaken by breezes as we passed, scattered drops upon us. "I do wish they'd lop their wretched trees," Ethel said. "Look—I'm soaked."

"Oh, it's not so bad as that," Richard answered.

"Not so bad! You don't wear my kind of clothes."

While they were speaking, I struggled to grasp some memory that the branch had vaguely suggested—a memory, I knew, connected with a smell of wood-smoke and violets and with a mood of fear. Was it not from that branch, perhaps, that a leaf had fallen into my lap long ago and been crushed between my dogskin gloves? The

scene returned; I knew my old shyness again. I turned my head out of the carriage to gaze at the porch we were approaching, and almost expected to hear Ethel exclaim: "Don't stare out like that, Nigel. What will they think if they are watching from the windows?" But she remained silent, for she was no longer her little brother's keeper. When the carriage drew up at the door, she did not at once move, but sat still and listless until the servant came. "Well, we're here," she said at last with a sigh.

Here also the routine of the house was unchanged. The servant showed Ethel and Richard to their rooms and afterwards began to lead me towards the new wing. "Surely," I thought, "there's not going to be an exact repetition of detail! Are we all going to occupy the same rooms, and shall I find the same hair-tidies on the dressing-table?" But suddenly at the door of the nursery the servant turned aside and took me into the old night-nursery which communicated with it.

"Here!" I said involuntarily and beneath my breath. A greyish daylight, watered by a pale sun, stood in the room where Clare had slept, where she and I had stood together in darkness.

The man, having heard me speak, allowed his face to express a general question, but he said no more than that my baggage should at once be sent up to me, and, closing the door, withdrew.

This room, though narrower than the nursery itself, was a companion to it. Here also Agatha

and Pug's childhood survived—not, indeed, so conspicuously as in the rocking-horse, the scrap-book screen, and the pine bookshelves of the adjoining room, but clearly enough to save the place from the formal appearance of a mere guest-chamber and to give it a friendly air of having been continuously lived in. In the boarding that backed the narrow window-seat, Pug, with assurance, and Agatha, as his timid follower, had carved an immortality for themselves: JON TROBEY and AGATHA T. Under a new carpet was worn linoleum; on the wall, a contradiction to the silken wall-paper that surrounded it, was screwed a small battered cupboard of oak, empty now but for a box of slugs that had once been ammunition for a catapult and was eloquent of Pug's barbarian days. The door of the cupboard, when it lay open, revealed a crumbling document, attached by drawing-pins, which in sprawling capitals was headed RABBITS, and told the melancholy history of Agatha's pets: how they had bred and multiplied, by what names—Loppa, Daisy, Zipporah, Jethro, Admiral—they had been known, and how some, yet unnamed, had been cut off in their youth, and their biography written in the word DEAD. On the mantelpiece, among ornaments more sophisticated, were two pictorial mugs—one that told of the three bears, another that combined Queen Victoria with Salisbury Cathedral. Wandering among these records of the past, I found it easy to imagine Pug when he had

still been Jon to all the world, and Agatha while her hair fell upon her shoulders, and I began to think that I should never be able to hate or ridicule any of mankind, if, in imagination, I first shared their childhood with them. "From his power to see children in men sprang that unique quality in Christ's judgment which was not what we call justice nor what we call mercy," I thought. "And it is this power of imagination which, if an artist possess it, separates him from other men so that they can see nothing from his point of view. They are not to blame; they must conduct the world as it is; they are its administrators, not the givers of truth to it. When a judge sends a murderer to be hanged, he does what he must. If the prisoner's mother come to plead on his behalf, the judge dares not regard her. He and she are at cross-purposes—she pleading for a child in a man's shape; he 'protecting the community,' as he is bound. She is a sentimentalist, remembering what is not. He must harden his heart against her, for she speaks to the truth of innocency, and his justice is concerned with the accident of experience. Did the prisoner kill? the Court asks. Is her baby a murderer? asks she. It is a fact; yet not truth. So that we may pass sentence upon him, so that we may, in our own justice, be just to any human being, we must forget what it was of the essence of Christ to remember. Yet so it must be while we are what we are," I reflected, allowing my eyes to move slowly over the room, "for if

each criminal stood his trial in his own nursery there could be neither prison nor gallows."

I could not see any escape from this paradox, but I was not made unhappy by it, "for," I said, "I am beginning to understand what it is that gives moral, as well as æsthetic, beauty to a great painting or a great poem, however debased its subject may be. A great artist perceives beneath all concealments that innocency of life which is the only background capable of exhibiting the truth of pain, of joy, of each human experience. In the criminal he perceives one who formerly was guiltless; in the harlot, maidenhood; in age, youth. Portraying the flesh, he discovers the origin and the journey of the soul."

Was it this thought that led Vasari to call Leonardo "celestial?" Did an artist so great as he, through the eyes of whose sitters childhood looked out, as it seems to have looked out continually into the face of Christ, inevitably suggest, even in his own appearance, something godlike, "celestial," belonging to another world? I left my bedroom wondering how those whom I saw would have been seen by Leonardo, and vainly striving to imagine what would have been the effect of his presence in our midst. Perhaps, I thought, even he would have been baffled now and then, for there were some, neither evil nor dull of mind, in whom childhood seemed to have been lost beyond hope of imaginative recovery. Or was that simply a failure of my own vision? Mrs. Trobey,

as she welcomed me, offered no depth within her; I could never have painted her; she wore an impenetrable mask. Her husband, in all but experience, was still a boy; his youth gleamed and twinkled in him; but she was stiffened in moralities, and her soul, like her body, was corsetted and coy. Henry Fullaton she petted because, standing at her side, he elaborately courted her, reminding her, perhaps, of those vanished days when her curly hair, her sharp chin, and strong birdlike vivacity had seemed to command the world; but her husband she mocked when she could, because his devotion had been at its best childlike and doglike—an allegiance that had seemed so dull to her that she had let it weaken and disappear without lifting a jewelled finger to save it.

That she scorned him, Mr. Trobey could endure; this he had known from the beginning. But that she had allowed his love for her to wither he could not forgive, for she might so easily have refreshed it. Four years earlier, when I was so concerned with my own affairs that I had had no eyes for his, he had seemed a pleasant, absurd little man; this had been the view of him imposed by Mrs. Trobey, as a formula, on her more receptive guests. But now I could see him as one who, through overmuch confidence and a passion too eager, had lost his way. He had, indeed, blindfolded himself; it was, if you will, his own fault that he was lost; he should have known his wife better and trusted her less. But still, though

he knew by now the vanity of it, he stretched out his hand to her for guidance; she took not the least notice of him. And so, because he was an unconquerable little man who would never sit down by the roadside and confess himself lost in the world, he turned to others—to Pug who was polite, to Agatha who would have loved him if he had not been afraid of her, to Richard, to Ethel, even to me. As I watched him, guiltily and clumsily balancing a cup and saucer beside his wife's tea-table, I realized that his conventionally affable remarks, delivered in an undertone so that Mrs. Trobey should not snap them up, were his peculiar, hopeless means of inviting affection.

So, with an increasing sense of the change in myself that made such observation possible, I observed them all, and began to pity in them, as I had pitied in my own family, the twisting that life had given to their several purposes. Once I had been afraid of them, and now—well, it was not men and women that there was need to fear, but rather life's reluctance to complete the pattern of personality, its tendency to leave you encumbered with a thousand dreams neither fulfilled nor completely put away, but floating perpetually in the air like balloons on a string, useless, voyaging nowhere, but unpricked. My eyes, staring before me, were upon Henry Fullaton's boots, planted wide on the patterned hearth-rug, and suddenly, raising my gaze a little, I saw between his legs a cross-stitch screen on which

was worked: "Hannah Kirk, 1808." Then I remembered with full imaginative remembrance that it was in this room that I had first seen Clare. I turned to the window-seat where, behind curtains, she had been concealed, and, instead of joy in the memory of her, a coldness entered my heart as I stared into the autumnal daylight, a coldness of contrast and of exaltation broken. "Should I observe her, also," I asked myself, "as I observe them? Am I so far removed from those days that I should pity her and be dead to the impact of her beauty? If so," I tried to say, "perhaps it is well, for there can be no perfect recapture; I cannot again for the first time draw back those curtains, and hear her laugh for the first time, and see her throw back her head to exclaim: 'So you've come to life at last! So you've really come to life at last!' Perhaps it is well that the mood, with the curtains, has been changed. . . . And yet why do I so desperately assure myself that it is well? Why does the old dream float perpetually on memory's string?"

So many Septembers have passed since then, and so many balloons floated vainly on strings, that I ought, by common reckoning, to smile at my idea that I had grown old between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one. But I cannot smile at the recollection of what was then a pervading and insistent discovery, as startling and far more poignant than the later discovery of middle age. Something had slipped from me and yet not

wholly vanished; something precious, eluding my present touch, looked out at me through a mist; and that was an unfamiliar experience at twenty-one. Certainly it is the experience that I remember. After tea I walked in the garden with Henry Fullaton, but I recall little of all he said in answer to what were probably my histories of Paris. Did I speak to him of Miss Fullaton's death? I do not know. Was it then, or afterwards at dinner, that he told stories of Norwegian salmon? I remember nothing but a harsh, melancholy impression, in spite of his vigour and abundant cheerfulness, of an old ship stranded, still oddly spick and span, on a comfortable and smiling shore.

I saw little of Agatha Trobey that day until after dinner when, following her plan, she drew me away to the nursery. Here my memory suddenly revives and I see her, shy, but with the impulsive challenge of shyness, standing before me when the door was shut behind us, and bidding me—with an air of preparation, almost of ritual—draw the curtains and turn up the lamp.

"You can talk to me about painting now," she said, "without hurting me. I have finished with it."

"Oh, but why?"

"You know why—because I couldn't paint."

But it was not, I soon discovered, of painting that she wished to speak.

"Do you think," she broke in suddenly, "that

you could paint Clare's portrait now?" She began to talk feverishly of Clare as if the subject, bitterly unwelcome, had been forced upon her, telling me how strange Clare's manner had been when she came to Lisson after my flight to Paris, how she had spoken of me now tenderly—as of a small boy, now with harshness—as of a man; how once, when sitting in this room in the chair she had occupied when I was drawing her, she had sprung up and declared that, if this were her room, she'd clear everything out and refurnish it. Why didn't Agatha refurnish it? Did she enjoy the company of that ugly, glass-eyed rocking-horse? Why didn't she make it into a room one could live in?

"She was angry," Agatha said, "because I refused—really angry, as if she'd set her heart on the change. Then one day Ned came in and scolded her for moping here instead of being out in the air. 'You're not still having your portrait painted, you know, by our runaway genius.' Then she flamed at him, saying first like a petulant child that she'd sit where she chose, and adding afterwards that she liked the room because—oh, because it had such a lovely outlook across the garden or some such lie."

I think Agatha told me all this because she could not forbear from tormenting herself. She sat with her chin resting on her fists, driving the words from her. She hammered on memory until her eyes spoke of her own wounding, and hammered still while scene after scene emerged from

the past, trivial scenes recalled at random and set forth with a maddening authenticity. Again and again, less in defence of Clare than because there was an indecency in Agatha's self-revelation, I interrupted her as one interrupts the intimacies of drunkenness. But, though checked, she would not be silenced. Her eyes were glowing with an inner fire. She was exulting in cruel, personal triumphs, and would not be denied.

"You see," she said, "Clare was convinced that you ran away from Windrush because you loved her so much that you dared not stay. That was what she had in her mind—fixed in her mind like a dagger that she couldn't pull out. And once," Agatha said with a twisting of her features, "she showed me a letter you had written to her from Paris. Such a dull letter, too—but she wasn't ashamed of that. I could see her reading all kinds of fantastic concealments into its dullness, and then I could see how frightened she was by the suspicion—more than a suspicion, though she wouldn't admit it—that after all there was nothing concealed."

After saying this Agatha was for a little while silent; then looked up with a quieter expression and said, in a voice of pleading: "You mustn't think I blame her. She didn't know what she was saying or doing half the time she was with me. I used to be quite silent, and so long as I was silent she couldn't resist talking—not in the least as she talked to the others. They guessed nothing

—except Henry Fullaton, who thought, probably, 'good thing he went off when he did,' and imagined that everything was now safe and composed. Oh, I don't blame her. She had fallen in love with you when it was too late, and that was what all her words were saying—and all her hoping too, and all her reading of your letters—'Too late! Too late!' And Ned guessed nothing. It might have been better if he had guessed, for then she might not have had to suffer him so much. I expect whenever he approached her she thought of you." And Agatha slowly repeated, "I expect whenever he came near and touched her she thought. . . ."

Then, after a long pause, she asked, with an extraordinary subtlety of voice that hid her expectation of an answer: "And for you, of course, it was all ended long ago?"

"Yes," I said, "long ago."

The words continued in my mind after they were spoken until I began to wonder whether it was indeed my own voice that had uttered them. They were true by my knowledge of myself, yet there was finality in them and no finality in my heart. The stillness of the room and Agatha's watchful repose became intolerable to me. Going to the window, I pulled back the curtains. A heavy cloud, like a dog stretched upward from the horizon, was banking over the moon.

"The moon's in the second quarter," Agatha said.

Whether she was giving plain information or

whether there was, to her own mind, some special meaning in her words, I do not know. They became for me an insistent echo from which I could not escape, and I recall to this day their tone as if they had been newly spoken in my ear. They, and my own words—"Yes, long ago"—became a significant part of the mood into which I fell, and I heard them continually resounding in the passages of thought. "It was ended long ago," my mind proceeded, "and never again shall I see Clare. I shall go my way and she hers, and we shall become accustomed to each other's absence. Accustomed—but unaware? Never, never unaware. Even now—and it is but three years since I saw her—I am struggling for exact imagination of her features, and when I am old shall I not struggle again and say: It was never ended. We did not know how to end it. There could never have been an end but the beginning which we failed to make together."

The dog joined his paws and stretched them over the moon. "And I shall continue," I thought, "for ever in intermittent expectation, in struggles for recapture, in strange, vain leapings of the spirit and the blood. For she, the first woman, is, therefore, all women, and shall live in all desire and worship, whether of humanity or of the gods, not to be escaped. While she lives, each year I shall dare less and less to approach her. It was ended long ago, I shall say with cautious wisdom. But if she should die before me, I shall curse

myself for having thrown my life away. I shall see her in the grave and shall think: This is not she. She lives on and on, in all wonders of the eye and all quickenings of the spirit."

The dog now was curved and broken and spread; the moon obscured. Vitality was parched within me; there seemed to be a drying before their time of life's springs; and hearing sounds—a distant uplifting of voices and the scurry of movement—I paid no heed to them and my mind did not ask their cause. Then behind me the door flew back from its latch. I turned with an overwhelming knowledge of what I should see; and saw Clare.

The shock brought quietness with it. She greeted Agatha first and kissed her; then gave me her hand. Her eyes were bright and wild; the muscles of her arm taut. In an instant, during that contact, the truth was told and the need for outward calm acknowledged. Agatha seemed a dwarf with wide eyes, crouching in a shadowy background.

"Oh," Clare said in answer to her questions, "I was tired of Norway and I knew you'd all be here now. Why shouldn't we go back? But Ned had his plans." And she added, with a smiling recollection of what must have been a sharp dispute: "So I came alone. It's fun to travel alone. You make such queer friends—people who would be afraid to come within a mile of Ned. There was an American couple who

were doubtful of the morality of British rule in India; they were anxious about the duty of Anglo-Saxons to the coloured races. And there was an English clergyman—a very old man with an unappreciative parish in Yorkshire—who approved the higher education of women and offered to teach me Hebrew by correspondence. And there was a young Bavarian who wanted me to try samples of his steel pens because, if only he could add enough to his firm's business, he would be able to marry. He showed me a photograph of the girl, carried in a pocket-book next his heart. If Ned had been with me we should have travelled in magnificent solitude and I should have met no one. As it is—well, Agatha, my dear, I have about sixteen shillings left."

"But," Agatha began, "didn't Ned give you——"

It was not until Clare's eyes defiantly answered that we understood the vigour of Ned's resistance to her journey. Short of locking her in, he had done, we guessed, what he could. The queer thing was that, seeing himself defeated, he had not come with her.

"Is Ned coming back?" Agatha asked.

"Oh yes," Clare replied, "but I expect he'll go straight to Windrush. I may find him there."

Mrs. Trobey, who had already heard an explanation of Clare's arrival, now came in to say that a bedroom had been prepared.

"It is the green room at the front of the house," she added. "I hope Ned will follow you here?"

"I don't suppose he will be back in England until we've gone," Clare answered.

"Oh," said Mrs. Trobey with mechanical hospitality that did not conceal, and was not intended to conceal, her disapproval of Clare's behaviour, "there must be no question of your going. We shall keep you here—and dear Mr. Fullaton—as hostages until Ned redeems you."

Henry Fullaton, with Pug and Mr. Trobey beside him, was in the doorway, wearing the gently sceptical smile which said: "I don't quite understand all this. But there, there; let us not be morally indignant; let's cultivate a sense of humour; let's be men of the world." Clare turned to him with laughter.

"Do you think we're in need of redemption? Perhaps you think I am?"

He shook his head, but otherwise disregarded her. "It's very kind of you, Mrs. Trobey," he said, "but Ned is so uncertain that I think we'd better stick to plan. Clare can come to Windrush with me when I go. I gather that she's bankrupt. She'll need an escort."

Mrs. Trobey agreed with no more than polite resistance, and began to ask of the Norwegian weather and Norwegian hotels. She and Agatha were seated; the rest of us stood round in an awkward group, asking in our minds questions

that could not come to our lips. Clare was at my side. Her fingers were tearing from the scrap-book screen the figure of a St. Bernard dog and dropping shreds of paper on the carpet. She gave no other sign of nervousness. But we did not look at each other while the conversation proceeded, and, when Mrs. Trobey rose at last as sign that the evening was at an end, we parted with no more than a deep gaze of acknowledgment and recognition.

There is no power greater than that of a secret to bind the soul. To share even the least of secrets with another is to be in part his servant, not because his will towards you is strengthened, but because your will is restricted. A part of the mind is bounded by the secrecy, and the soul within, like an animal that once roamed at large but is now hemmed in by a ring of fire, though it move indeed, and perhaps, more rapidly than before, moves only round and round on the inner side of the boundary.

As, when a boy, I had been bound to Clare by her recognition of my love for her, though she made then no return of it, so I was now bound by my recognition of passion in her. Before, feeling the need to re-establish singleness of heart, to escape abruptly if I was not for ever to be imprisoned, I had fled to Paris and so from myself. Now I was within a fiery wall of passionate

and secret expectancy which prevented me from seeing anything beyond it. There was no issue from the flame that surrounded me except by burning, and I desired no other issue.

Yet, I think, I never deceived myself by so connecting my present longing with my former love as to suppose that one promised a true consummation of the other. The ring of fire was complete and impenetrable. The past and the future became alike unimportant. I knew only that my whole being had become suddenly poised upon the edge of an inevitable action.

Clare herself, after the first defiant lightness of her arrival, was in my companionship gravely reticent, and delighted to speak to me of the Manor at Windrush, saying that it was pain to live there and not be content, for it was a place made for contentment. "But even you," she said, "were seldom at peace there, though the house and countryside were full of peace."

"She also," I thought, "has grown older by the greatest of all divisions between youth and age, for she has learned to look back. All life is no longer a future to her, and that change in outlook marks the end of first youth, the true end of childhood." But I myself could not then dwell upon the past, and, even as I asked her questions of it, I forgot to await her answers. As we walked together I saw only the gracious poise of her head bent to the wind, and thought: "We are waiting for each other, and shall receive each other, but

neither has need to speak our secret; it is the taste of the air we breathe."

So I thought when we were together and so even when we were apart. But sometimes, while I looked at her or meditated in her absence on her beauty, though I knew in my heart that she and I were so far committed to a passionate course that we should certainly pursue it to the end, an instinct of withdrawal made me ask: "How did we enter on this course? Did I choose it? Did she? Does it express the will or spirit of either?" It seemed, rather, to be a course that we took, not because it led us whither we would go, but because we knew no other, and could not now be at rest.

One late afternoon—it was the day before Mr. Fullaton and Clare were to go from Lisson—as she and I walked together in a little wood near the house, silence fell upon us. Looking up into the branches, she lifted her arms above her head, and I saw how her breasts were raised and tightened by the movement and how her body swayed from the feet. Seeing my gaze upon her and interpreting it, she did not smile, but looked steadily at me like some delicate fawn that gazes out upon a passer-by from the dark places of a thicket. So beautiful was she, so caught, seemingly, in an act of amazement, that at first I dared not move; but, though her lips were still and pale, her eyes were unflinching and denied me nothing. "You know better than I how I love you," she answered

when I with fear had spoken that word to her. "I am yours," her eyes added. "And I am not afraid."

We went on presently through the wood towards the house. As we walked across the lawns Mr. Trobey appeared on the terrace and waved to us. The thought that, when next we were alone, Clare and I should be alone indeed, made me, by a contrary twist, eager now for his company, and throughout the evening the presence of others, because its period was fixed, seemed not an intrusion, but an accentuation of our secret. Once, for a fleeting moment, when Henry Fullaton continued an old argument on what he claimed to be the exaggeration by Velasquez of light reflected in a mirror and I found myself answering him mechanically from a mind that gave no answer, a fear came to me that I should never care deeply for painting again. "The nearer fire outshines the greater," I thought. "My desire to create in art and the love I had for Clare are displaced now by a different love for a different woman. They belong to a different existence, and were mine in a different being, from which, though I look upon it in remembrance, I am now separated. Is it thus," I wondered, "that men feel when they are beneath a spell? Do they also look out on the sudden strangeness of familiar things and ask themselves: is it in life I move or in a dreaming side-track from life? And do they look beyond the spell and say: when and how shall I return to life? Where shall I lay hold upon myself again?"

No one at Lisson was aware of the crisis through which Clare and I were passing. How calm we were beneath the spell! We had grown in worldly experience and, without contriving deception, knew how to deceive. But Clare would not go that evening to sit in the nursery with Agatha. She chose instead to play whist, and I, in turn, made excuses.

"Are you going to watch them play?" Agatha asked.

"For a little while."

She nodded. "Very well," and held out her hand. "Then I'll say good night."

Did I imagine the knowledge which seemed then to be in her eyes? She did not look back from the door, but went out with a kind of casual sedateness and closed it firmly after her.

"Agatha gone?" said Mr. Trobey, choosing a card.

"It will do her good," Mrs. Trobey answered, "to go to bed early and have a long rest. She's far from strong, poor child."

"A-ha," said Mr. Trobey. "What do you say, partner, to a little trump?"

Clare, who was his partner, smiled, but made no reply. Mrs. Trobey closed her cards and opened them again fanwise, looking at them with disappointment as if she had hoped that by this operation they would have been improved. Richard, one of the best players of the game that I have ever known, sat straight and still, his face

wearing an expression of concentrated intelligence unvaried by any emotion of victory or defeat. Through the French windows, in spite of Mr. Trobey's protest that these autumn evenings were treacherous, Pug and Ethel had gone out together to see, they said, what kind of a day it would be to-morrow, for to-morrow Mr. Fullaton and Clare were to make their journey to Windrush, and Mrs. Trobey had planned for the rest of us, if the sun shone, her last picnic of the year at Derriman's Thicket. My own purpose was to remain near the card-table so that Mr. Fullaton, fearful of disturbing the players, might not draw me into hard conversation beyond my mood.

The cards fell regularly and were swept up with a little hissing on the baize. Mr. Trobey, as an aid to his slow decision, flicked the corners of those that lay at his side.

"You will bend them, my dear," Mrs. Trobey said, and for a time he desisted, only to begin again presently when he knew not what card to play.

Pug, returning, said the skies were clear and that there was a full moon.

"Like an orange," Ethel added. "You really ought to come out and look at it!"

The whist players did not turn their heads. They were playing more quickly now, with a pause at Mr. Trobey's turn and a swift patter following his choice. There was a rhythm in the sound and movement. How brilliantly the hearts

and diamonds swam up in the candlelight and what a strange, scalloped shadow the candles threw from Clare's cards on to her breast! Once, during a shuffle, she let her hands lie folded in her lap and lifted her face towards me. Mrs. Trobey perceived the glance and followed it.

"Is that right, I wonder?" Clare said at once, shifting her eyes to the clock at my shoulder. "We can't have been playing so long!"

"Oh," said Mrs. Trobey, "it's early yet. You to cut, Clare."

That quick deceit, suggesting a furtiveness that chilled pride, caused me for an instant to despise Clare and myself. But for an instant only. My pulses quickened; there was a tightening of my throat. A smile moved on her lips like the flickering of a leaf.

And soon they were standing at the table, dropping the packs into an inlaid cribbage-box. Her body was erect and quivering like the stem of a flower.

Because she and I passed through the valley of passion, where ourselves were lost in darkness, and issued into an air that the spirit might breathe again, I can think of our passage, not with shame, but with pity for travellers driven from their course. If I look back with the eyes of an old man experienced in this world's judgments, I see what the world would see—a youth, pierced

through and through by the idea of female nakedness, captured by his imagining, and a girl with pride abandoned, whipped by vanity and desire, writing for herself a falsely romantic chapter in her life. There are objects for the world's contempt! Where is the contemplative spirit now? So easily broken by lust's opportunity? So soon wasted in the hypocritical ocean that receives the bright streams of our early purposes? "Are not all animals on all fours?" says the Plain Man, who would have grinned at the woman taken in adultery and have wondered that Jesus made so much pother about so plain a case. "Where's the Fullaton angel now?" he cries. "Where is the holy woman about whose head a light shone in Windrush church? Some men have sick fancies and call them dreams and visions. Some women spin legends of themselves or have legends spun about them. But the difference between us, in the long run, is chiefly in heat of the blood."

So I can hear the Plain Man speak. But, if I look back with the eyes of one who rejects the world's judgments where they are but the hypocrisies of the unspiritual life, I see myself walking to and fro in my long, narrow bedroom, searching in my heart even then for the steady light that is in fulfilment, and falling back again and again before the hot blaze of desire. And I see her, in her own room, preparing to creep forth, fall back also, not in the guilt of disloyalty before any ghost of her husband, but before her own image,

before her own pride, her own virginal remembrance. She too seeks fulfilment which has become necessary to the progress of life—seeks it under such compulsion that she cannot resist the lie which promises it to her, though she knows it to be a lie. It is not lust only that drives her, but a vain striving to rediscover love's first pattern, by her rejected.

I hear her enter the nursery softly and with soft step pass my door. Standing still to attend the silence that follows a cessation of her movement, I watch the light from the candle on a low table cling to the silken wall-paper, and wonder what is of the candle and what of the moon. Shall I analyse the light? But beyond the door she is waiting, asking herself, perhaps, whether after all I misunderstood her and have fallen asleep. Am I asleep? Shall I awake in the morning to find all this a dream? In my hands is the box containing the leaden slugs. I must have had it all this time in my hands and have walked to and fro with it, listening to the soft rattle of the little pieces of lead within. Now, as I lay it down, the ball of my finger, like a blind man's, runs over the lettering embossed on the lid.

The nursery as I enter it falls apart. Its material substance is seen and vanishes. It is as if my body were without weight and space without confinement—as if I trod upon a sea of rushing moon. Her face is turned to me and her throat; her shoulders are lighted and emerging. This seems

an eternal face, the face of woman fearful of her desire yet with courage to fulfil it, of woman compelled whose own will is her compulsion—such a face as the Serpent may have seen when Eve yielded. Is this she whom I have loved? It is she whom love has loved and I am as nothing before her; I have no existence in her eyes. I am neither boy nor man, but an idea to which she offers her being, a projection of her longing, by it created. Therefore in my heart I fall down before her as before my Creator, yet stand before her a giant, the image by which her imagination is enslaved.

It is strange that her lips, whose touch is the touch of flesh, are like the lips of a harlot, yet have the majesty of lips of stone hewn in a mountain's side. I am torn in a conflicting agony of mastership and adoration. It is strange that her hair, which muffles my senses with intoxicating odour, should yet have the freshness of grasses wherein the face is buried on a hill, and that the warmth of her body, laid against me so that her limbs are distinguished by my limbs, should be the warmth of earth throwing up the sun again.

Am I leading her with the gentleness of a supplicant or dragging her with the urgency of a beast? There my candle shines from its low table and the white bed lies still beneath stalactites of darkness. She speaks my name that seems not to be my name, then is silent as the dress she wears falls from her and nakedness casts a hood

over my mind. My eyes travel up the body and see above it Clare's own face. But now she has shut her eyes and is covering herself with her folded arms. She stretches out her hands, advances; the sheaths of light fall from her; and the voice is Clare's own voice. Her body is a sapling, bent in the night by a wind. Her beauty is a tempest which sweeps the soul of its identity until it is an empty house. These are her breath, her form, her movement, but she is not. These are my hands and my lips dried by fire, but I am not.

Until, with desire's falling away, we return, and gaze silently upon ourselves returning, and hear, distant but approaching, a clock.

In the morning very early I heard again the clock. I listened to it without any association of the passing of time with its sound. As I lay in the pierced darkness, it was for me, like the movement of her breathing, part of an absolute rhythm independent of circumstance. But at last a thought looked up at me out of my mind. "She is lying at my side. Clare is near to me. Though it is very early, soon there will be other sounds in the world." I lay still, as if my stillness would protect me.

When stillness itself became expectation, demanding its own end, I twisted myself so that I might see the uncurtained window and learn how near earth was to awaking. Outside was neither

day nor promise of day—only a slow wearying of night as if, now that the moon was gone, night without her companion waited sadly for release. It was too dark to distinguish Clare's features, but I gazed at the oval patch that was her face with a terrible, secret curiosity—secret, I mean, even from a part of myself. I felt an infinite tenderness towards her, yet wished to escape; I felt love, even that peace of heart which is love's rarest gift, yet there were spurs urging me to be gone. Nothing in my life, I knew, would ever be more joyful than these moments while my head was propped on my fist and cool air touched my forearm. How I should remember them when they were ended! How, in old age, I do remember them! Here were finality and content. No need to struggle or make plans. The day was not come; the world slept. Gaze on, gaze on, hear her slow breath. Be still.

Yet the secret questioner who forbids stillness in the midst of life asked within me: who was she whose flesh lay there? Though, beneath the dark, she had the outward form of her I loved, she was a stranger. To consume her body would be forever a spiritual adultery. She would encompass me with secrets and harness me with her delights.

I began then to move with an intention to escape, not from Clare, but from that part of myself which was enslaved—as a fox that gnaws his way from a trap. I began to move very quietly so that I should not disturb her. "I must not

wake her," I said, and began to imagine that, when we met again, this night would seem to both of us a dream and so be put away from knowledge. "I must not wake her," I repeated. Then, suddenly, I knew, though the rhythm of her breathing did not change, that she was awake, and had long been awake, watching me through her lashes. Still I moved with elaborate caution, whispering again and again in my mind: "I must not wake her. She must sleep on."

But the knowledge that she was awake prevailed, and stayed me with an expectant wonder. I had moved not more than a few inches when, feeling that I could move no more, I sank down and waited and fell into dreams. I thought that I was a child again and that I stood before a great gate, watching it open. It was Clare who opened it. She was dressed in a luminous robe and a hood that concealed her face, but I knew that she was Clare. She seemed not to know me. After I had entered and had found myself in a densely wooded park, of which she, perhaps, was the guardian, I heard her bolting the gates behind me, and turned to speak with her, sure that she would now recognize me. There was no one by the gates. I looked wildly round and cried out: "Clare! Clare!" At a distant turn of a path, beneath the branches of dark trees which belonged to my father's garden at Drufford, I saw her standing, not now wearing her luminous garments, but naked. I ran towards her. My feet made no

sound, but she did not attempt to escape. But, when I came near, her head twisted round, like a doll's head on a swivel, and I saw that her face was of carved wood, painted, and scarred by worms. Throwing up my hands to cover my eyes, I awoke. My arms were thrown wide across the bed. Clare had risen and was gone.

I found her in the day-nursery, standing by the window. Her back was towards me, and for an instant I was afraid to approach lest my dream should be fulfilled and a face of terror confront me. But I took my place at her side, and knew suddenly that she and I were of one mind. Before us was neither flower nor tree nor sky, but ghostly masses dark and less dark. Within the room, the faint pallor of the rocking-horse swung low in the air. It was a white steed of Uccello's, charging the gloom under a stream of banners.

We knew now—we had known always, but recognized now—that to our love's demand there was no quittance in the flesh. In this life, as man and woman having bodies, we had reached an end.

She had wanted to recapture the love that I had once offered her, to run away from reality, back to childhood, back to being a girl again. She called it romance, she called it vanity, humbling herself; but she spoke without shame—indeed, with a kind of desperate pride as if, fighting, she had been overwhelmed by forces beyond her weapons' defence. Her desire had been the spirit's unending desire to be remade. She had longed

to re-create herself in the image of the girl I had loved—to be that girl, to give her to me. She had been able to do no more than love the man I had become.

"That's one of the tricks of life," she said; and soon: "Now we must go our own ways, Nigel; for together there's no way for us that isn't a mockery. Your love was too soon, mine too late. It's as if two people with different languages were to learn to speak to each other only after their secrets had become meaningless."

I had been slower than she in understanding the finality of our division. While she was quietly speaking, as of an experience grown calm in the past, I had begun to wonder vainly what would have come of it if we had gone from Lisson together that first night of confession—if we had, indeed, gone out on to the hills and, finding there no miraculous coach, had taken what escape earth offered. And, running with my thoughts, she said:

"It would always have been useless, Nigel—even if I had gone when you asked it, even if I had shared your love in time."

But I, slower than she to be wise, though I knew that our desire was without fulfilment on earth, could not yet escape the conflicting thought that now, within my reach so that I might seize and hold it, was a body that would always bear the name and lineaments of her I loved, yet would never be she. She would accompany me always, she would command my brush, inhabit

my spirit, stir ghostly in the bed of whatever love might come. But I should never attain her.

My heart rose in vain rebellion; but, as Clare looked at me out of the stream of darkness, I saw that she was resolved and beyond doubt's torment. I knew that she was looking into her own future and had accepted it. In that moment, we lived all our lives and lived them together. Henceforth she and I would go separately through the earth, and now must part.

She sank into the window-seat, and with a simple movement drew me down so that my head was beneath her breast and her hair fell upon me.

"We are together for the first time," she seemed to say, though perhaps it was her silence, perhaps my thought that spoke. "We are together, for no lie divides us. Believe that I am she you loved, that it is her hair that covers you, that these are her hands in yours. You loved her in the spirit, not in the flesh. You created her in the spirit; you could not possess her in the flesh. Create her continually. Do not let her die. Be in her always."

Now there was no sound. She stooped and kissed me. Her tears fell on my hands.

"The girl you loved has not escaped or betrayed you," she said presently. "For her sake, forgive me. When I am here no more, she will remain with you."

For a little while she was silent; then, releasing me, was gone.

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